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# On the temptation of Jesus.

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# ON THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

A Dissertation Presented

by

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To Fred, Lois, and Elizabeth

In Memory of Lindsay

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ABSTRACT

ON THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

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It seems that the teachings of orthodox Christian doctrine may actually suggest that Jesus' life does not provide a useful moral example for the rest of us. The traditional doctrine of the Incarnation states that Jesus was fully human and fully God. The Bible says that Jesus was "tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin." But someone who is "fully God" cannot possibly sin, since one of God's attributes is necessary moral perfection. And yet to say that someone was tempted to sin seems to imply, in a commonsensical way, that it was possible for that person to sin. I call this the "Temptation Problem".

A number of philosophers and theologians have considered this problem or problems very much like it. I consider the proposed solutions to this apparent difficulty of Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, R.L. Sturch, and Thomas V. Morris. Each of their solutions fails, I argue, although each of them presents an interesting way of dealing with the seemingly incompatible human and divine attributes of Jesus.

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# CHAPTER 1

## THE TEMPTATION PROBLEM

> So there [Jesus] stood, a red rose in his hand, gazing at the village girls as they danced under a large, newly foliaged poplar. And while he looked and weighed one against the other - he wanted them all, but did not have the courage to choose - suddenly he heard cackling laughter behind him: a cool fountain rising from the bowels of the earth. He turned. Descending upon him with her red sandals, unplaited hair and complete armor of ankle bands, bracelets and earrings was Magdalene, the only daughter of his uncle the rabbi. The young man's mind shook violently. "It's her I want, her I want!" he cried, and he held out his hand to give her the rose. But as he did so, ten claws nailed themselves into his head and two frenzied wings beat above him, tightly covering his temples. He shrieked and fell down on his face, frothing at the mouth. His unfortunate mother, writhing with shame, had to throw her kerchief over his head, lift him up in her arms and depart.
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> - Nikos Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ

Throughout the history of Christianity Jesus has been presented as a model or moral example for humanity in its struggle with sin and temptation. But it seems that orthodox Christian doctrine actually teaches us that Jesus' life and example are not relevant to our human moral concerns. The traditional doctrine of the Incarnation says, roughly, that Jesus had two natures - divine and human - in one person. Through his human nature he was "like us in every respect" [Hebrews 2:14, 17], while maintaining the attributes of the divine nature.[1] Each of the Synoptic Gospels contains the

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1. All Biblical quotations and references are from the Revised Standard Version.

story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.[2] More to our point, the author of Hebrews explains why it was important that Jesus was tempted at all:

> Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted...For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.[3]

He was tempted, just as we are, but he steadfastly resisted succumbing to any temptation. But therein lies the problem. To say that someone is tempted to sin seems to imply, in a sort of commonsensical way, that it is possible for that person to sin. But Jesus' divine nature has as one of its attributes necessary moral goodness: there is no possible world where Jesus performs a morally wrong action. So it was actually not possible for Jesus to sin. But if this is so, the claim that Jesus somehow resisted temptation loses a great deal of force. If Jesus could not sin anyway, then the Pauline injunction to "be imitators of Christ" and to resist temptation ourselves seems to be nothing more than the Biblical equivalent of "just say no". We can refer to this difficulty - that the doctrine of the Incarnation seems to imply that Jesus could be tempted but could not sin - as the "Temptation Problem". As we will see later in this chapter, the earliest Christian writers seemed unaware of

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2. See Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-22.
3. Hebrews 2:17-18, 4:15.

(or uninterested in) this problem. But as early as Augustine attempts to explain the problem away result in some strains within the orthodox tradition. And the attempts of important later writers, such as Aquinas and Anselm, to explain the apparent contradiction between the claim that Christ could sin and the claim that Christ could not sin lend credence to my assertion that the Temptation Problem is, in fact, a problem for traditional orthodoxy.

The passage quoted above, from Kazantzakis's The Last Temptation of Christ, portrays graphically what might happen to the human Jesus were he to approach temptation. In Kazantzakis's view, apparently, the force of the necessary goodness of Jesus' divine nature is every bit as powerful and gripping as the force of ten large bird claws grabbing one's head. In this story, Jesus seems to be prevented from succumbing to the temptation of Mary Magdalene by divine intervention - apparently, in this case, his own divine nature.

But Kazantzakis's story is disturbing in its portrayal of Jesus as a poor role model in the face of temptation. Jesus is presented with the spectacle of Mary, and he immediately chooses her over the other village girls for his wife. Her appearance, however, is that of a prostitute, and the passage implies that she is somehow not really a proper candidate for one's spouse. But Jesus does not resist her allure by some force of character or holy will. He is prevented, almost as if by a force outside himself, from

approaching her by the sensation of large, powerful claws gripping his head so that he writhes in pain and forgets Mary altogether. It is important to note that Kazantzakis's Jesus, although he does not succumb to the temptation, clearly is influenced by Mary Magdalene's appearance to the point of desiring her (at least for his wife). Something attracts him, but he is prevented from pursuing it by the claws gripping his head. This Jesus seems to be genuinely tempted, even though he is prevented from committing the sin which is implied in the description of Mary and his attraction to her. But Kazantzakis's picture of Jesus as a lustful young man who quickly lunges at the prostitute Mary, only to be prevented from going to her by the sensation of claws and wings around his head, is hardly an attractive or even workable role model for the rest of us when we are tempted. If the only thing that prevents Jesus from succumbing to temptation is his divine nature, manifested in the claws, then the rest of us are in for some rough going when we are faced with temptations.

Several thinkers in the Christian tradition have tackled this problem; some head-on, some obliquely. Two routes of defense seem open. One way to solve the Temptation Problem is to show that it is not a logical contradiction to claim that it was both possible and impossible that Jesus commit a sin. This, in turn, allows one to claim that, since it was possible for Jesus to sin, then he could be tempted "in every way that we are". Another way to solve the problem

is to show that even if one cannot sin in any significant way one is nonetheless able to be tempted in the relevant way or ways. My purpose in the chapters that follow is to show that neither of these approaches succeeds in solving the Temptation Problem.

Temptation is a common human experience. Temptation and resistance to temptation are standard themes of almost any religious or even secular morality. In our everyday speech we often loosely speak of being "tempted" by this or that object or action. We say that we are tempted to skip class, for example, or that we are tempted by a box of chocolates. We seem in these cases to mean, somewhat roughly, that we are allured by, attracted to, or at least seriously considering those objects or actions. Another way of understanding these "loose" versions of "tempt" is that we mean by them that we are strongly disposed or inclined to do something. If I say that I am tempted to buy a doughnut with my midmorning coffee, I mean that I am strongly inclined to buy (and eat!) a doughnut with my coffee at that time. Sometimes "temptation" is used, especially Biblically, to describe a test of faith. Many times religious persons see temptations that come their way as tests of their faith: an attractive person of whatever sex they are interested in may present a "test" of their marriage vows and/or their relationship with God. We might claim that Abraham is tempted, in this usage of being "put to the proof", when God orders him to sacrifice Isaac. It certainly seems that when

we are enticed to do something immoral there is an element of proof or testing in such an enticement; a test, that is, of whether we can withstand the allure. Many writers seem to portray Jesus' temptations in the wilderness as tests; the Devil presents Jesus with a series of tests, on this view, that he must pass to prove his ability (to withstand some attractive or alluring possibility) in support of the claims about his Messiahship. Even though the conclusion to such tests seems foregone, in the case of Jesus, there is still a proof of Jesus' ability to resist temptation by refusing the Devil's offers. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of these everyday or "loose" uses of "tempt"; others are easily imaginable.

The most important way in which one can be tempted, however, is the kind of temptation in which someone or something entices one to do something immoral or, perhaps, unwise, with the promise of pleasure, gain, or reward. One is tempted to commit a sin such as telling a lie, for example, because one believes that telling the lie will give one some advantage or perhaps allow one to escape responsibility for something. Or someone may be tempted to cheat on an exam with a goal in mind of getting into a better graduate program or obtaining a more lucrative job. This leaves us with the question of the sufficient conditions for enticement. Webster suggests that one is enticed when one is either drawn on, attracted, or lured by the arousal of hope or desire. One who is tempted in this

way is one who is attracted or lured (or drawn on) to do something immoral (or perhaps unwise) by the arousal of hope or desire for some pleasure, gain, or reward. Kazantzakis's depiction of Jesus' attraction to Mary Magdalene seems to fit this description. Of course this kind of "temptation" may have the "testing" aspect referred to above, but the theologically interesting question about Jesus is not whether he could be tested but whether he could be enticed to do something immoral or, perhaps, unwise, with the promise of pleasure, gain, or reward.[4]

One further distinction will help us. Let's distinguish, somewhat loosely, "internal" temptation from "external" temptation. When my daughter Kelsey presents me with a box of chocolate-covered candies, I am tempted insofar as someone or something is presenting a potentially alluring or at least attractive possibility to me. This is what I am calling "external" temptation. If Kelsey tells me that they are chocolate-covered cherries, I will also be

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4. I am inclined to believe that these different ways or kinds of temptation are actually different senses of the term "tempt". One might argue for this by saying that it is possible to say truly, "I am tempted to eat a donut this morning, but I am not tempted to eat a donut this morning," without uttering a contradictory statement. I am attracted by the possibility of eating a donut, that is to say, but I am not thereby enticed or allured to do something immoral or unwise with the promise or hope of gain or reward. I am not sure that much turns on this point, however, and the Biblical claim is simply that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are. Certainly an important way of being tempted is the way I have described above as being theologically interesting. Thus the point I want to discuss throughout the following chapters is whether Jesus could be tempted in that way.

attracted (perhaps even enticed) by the candies. This attraction to or enticement by something or some action that some agent feels is what I am calling "internal" temptation. If she tells me that they are chocolate-covered ants, it is unlikely that I will be attracted to or enticed by the candies. We might say truly, in the case of the ants, that I am tempted by the candies but also not tempted by them. I am presented with something that might allure or entice me, but it does not, in fact, so allure or entice me. When we discuss claims such as "Jesus was tempted in every way that we are", it is really not interesting to discuss whether he was tempted externally; of course he was surrounded by the same potentially alluring or attractive things as anyone else who lived at the time. What is of interest is whether he experienced internal temptation: whether any of those things presented to him allured or enticed him to do something immoral or unwise.

The real issue, then, in a discussion of the temptation of Jesus is not simply whether he was tempted but whether he was tempted in the theologically interesting way mentioned above; that is, whether Jesus could feel enticed (allured or attracted) to perform immoral or unwise acts with a promise of pleasure, gain or reward. It seems plausible that the Jesus of the orthodox tradition could be tempted by a box of sweets in the way that we are without any threat to doctrinal claims about his nature. But the same is not true about the claim that Jesus was tempted in <u>every</u> way that we

are. For that to be true it must be true that he could be tempted in this last, interesting way. But that, as was already mentioned, seems impossible. This is not a new question; Christian thinkers from the earliest Fathers on have mentioned or discussed Jesus' nature and the limits it seems to place on his temptation. And the answer has profound implications for Jesus as a moral example: how can a human who cannot possibly sin be a useful or effective moral role model or exemplar for situations of temptation? Curiously, it seems that none of the traditional answers to the Temptation Problem provides a solution adequate to maintain the claims orthodox Christianity makes about Jesus the Christ.

Anselm, for example, argues in Cur Deus Homo that it was both impossible and possible for Jesus to sin. It was impossible, obviously, because Jesus was necessarily morally good. It was possible, he suggests, because Jesus was able to utter words that could possibly be a lie (such as, "My Father is not God"). In Chapter 2 I will discuss Jaspar Hopkins's suggestions for why this approach fails.[5] Aquinas, also, claims that Jesus can be tempted while retaining the attribute of necessary moral goodness, but I believe his approach results in a less than fully human Jesus. Jesus, according to Aquinas, is not tainted by original sin because

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5. Anselm of Canterbury, Cur Deus Homo, in St. Anselm: Basic Writings, trans. by S.N. Deane, (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1962), II, 10; Jaspar Hopkins, A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), pp. 162-167.

he is not born of man and woman - his only human parent is a woman (the passing on of the capacity to sin is apparently sperm-specific for Aquinas). Unlike all of us, then, Jesus' original justice is intact. Original justice is the quality that Adam lost when he sinned; it was consequently lost for the rest of us in Adam's sin. Jesus' divine nature ensured that he lacked the ability to lose original justice, while Adam, of course, had the ability to lose his original justice. But the difference between Adam's ability to sin and Jesus' apparent lack of that ability suggests that the Thomistic Christ is not so fully human as one might wish; he lacked the ability - and perhaps the freedom - to sin that all the rest of us have. Such a capacity or ability seems, one might argue, to be an essential characteristic of full humanity.[6] This is discussed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 I examine an interesting solution, by R.L. Sturch, to the problem that it seems contradictory to claim, as C.L. Martin does, that it is possible that Christ sinned and also impossible that he sinned. In Chapter 5 I will examine the claim that Thomas Morris makes defending the possibility of Jesus' temptation while maintaining the necessary moral goodness of Christ. In the rest of this chapter I will discuss briefly how some of the early Christian thinkers talked about temptation, with a special emphasis on the teachings of Augustine. Augustine never exactly attempts to

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6. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a. 14, 1; 3a. 15, 1; and elsewhere.

solve the Temptation Problem, but he says enough about the relevant subjects in his work to propose what might be called an Augustinian solution.

The earliest mention of the claim that Jesus was tempted are, of course, quotations from the New Testament. Matthew 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4 tell the story of the temptation of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness. Each of these three gospels also contains, in the account of Jesus waiting to be arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' admonition to the disciples to "pray that you may not enter into temptation." In these passages "temptation" seems to be used ambiguously. On the one hand it means attraction to or allure by an unwise or immoral act, while on the other hand it also means a test or trial. Jesus comments on both the inevitability of temptation and the sin of creating or causing temptation in a story told in both Matthew 18 and Luke 17, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to him by whom they come."[7] In Paul's first letter to Corinth [7:5], he advises married couples not to abstain too long from sexual relations, "lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control." Later in the same letter Paul warns against overconfidence in one's ability to lead the holy life, while at the same time promising that God will not allow anyone to

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7. This is a slightly troublesome passage. The Greek here actually reads something like "*stumbling blocks* are sure to come...", but virtually every translation renders that term as "temptations".

undergo a trial or allurement beyond his or her capacity to endure:

> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to humankind. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. [10:12-13]

Similarly, in Galatians 6:1, Paul recommends that, "if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness [and] look to yourself, lest you too be tempted." In the letter of James, an early Hellenistic Christian takes a strong stand on temptation; indeed, this is perhaps the clearest definition of temptation offered in the New Testament:

> Blessed is the one who endures trial for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by god"; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.[1:12-14]

It is especially worthy of note here two claims that James makes: God cannot be tempted with evil and each person is tempted when he is lured by his own desire. These claims, and similar claims, will figure prominently in later discussion of the Temptation Problem.

Perhaps most relevant of the New Testament occurrences of "temptation" are the following two passages from Hebrews. The first is intended to explain part of the problem of why God had to take on human form in order to work salvation:

> Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that

> through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage...Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.[2:14-15, 17-18]

The second passage asserts the central claim that Jesus was tempted "in every way that we are, yet without sin". Although there has been some discussion about how exactly to interpret this passage (see below for Augustine's creative version), the main thrust seems clear and straightforward: Jesus was tempted in all the ways that we are but, unlike all of us, he did not ever succumb.

> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. [4:14-16]

The non-Biblical literature dating from after the time of Jesus makes mention of "temptation" mostly in terms of the human moral situation, with little or no reference to Jesus or his temptation. The Didache, a tract generally believed to have been compiled before the end of the first century after Jesus, includes an instruction to pray what we call the "Lord's Prayer" three times daily; that prayer, of course, asks that God "lead us not into temptation".[8]

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8. Anonymous, The Didache, in The Didache, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Epistles and Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, etc., trans. by James A. Kleist, (Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1961), No. 6 in the Ancient Christian Writers, ed. by J. Quasten and J.C.

Polycarp, in his Epistle to the Philippians, written somewhere around 140 A.D., seems to see "temptation" as something best avoided. He enjoins his readers:

> ...Be temperate and ready for our prayers, persevere in fasting, and fervently implore the All-seeing God 'not to expose us to temptation,' since the Lord has said, 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'[9]

Tertullian, writing sometime after the year 200 in An Exhortation to Chastity, clearly understands temptation as a testing or trial, and sees even in the law a certain form of temptation:

> A permission is usually a test of character, because to resist temptation is to prove one's mettle, and because a permission is often itself a temptation. Thus it is, then, that *all things* may be *lawful, but not all are expedient*, since a man is subjected to a test when a permission is granted him and it is on the basis of this test in matters permitted that he is judged.[10]

Of course temptation is more than this. Tertullian also spoke of the "sins which beset us every day and to which we are all tempted":

> For who will not, as it may chance, fall into unrighteous anger and continue this even beyond sundown, or even strike another or, out of easy habit, curse another, or swear rashly, or violate his pledged faith, or tell a lie through shame or the compulsion of circumstances? In the management of affairs, in the performance of duties, in commercial transactions,

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Plumpe (London: Longmans, Green, and Co.; Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press), p. 19.

9. Polycarp, Epistles to the Philippians, in Kleist, trans., The Didache, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Epistles and Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, etc., p. 79.

10. Tertullian, An Exhortation to Chastity, in Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage, trans. by William P. Le Saint, (Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1956), No. 13 in the Ancient Christian Writers, ed. by J. Quasten and J.C. Plumpe (London: Longmans, Green, and Co.; Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press), p. 55.

> while eating, looking, listening - how often we are tempted!

Even though the devil, "that stubborn enemy of ours", may be the occasion or originator of temptations that we are faced with, Tertullian argued quite strongly about the free nature of our choices to sin (or not, of course). He points out that

> ...we ought not to ascribe to God's will something which has been the subject of our own free choice, since he who wishes the good does not wish evil...Accordingly, it is of our own volition that we choose what is evil against the will of God, who wishes what is good. And if you ask me whence comes this volition of ours by which we set our will against the will of God, I should reply that it comes from our own selves. Nor is this rashly said, if, indeed, Adam the author of our race and of our fall, willed the sin which he committed; for you yourself must needs be like the father whose seed you are. The devil did not force on Adam the choice of sin, but merely supplied him with an object he might choose...So you also, should you disobey the Lord, who gave you the power of free choice along with His command, will, of your own volition, turn aside to what He does not desire.[12]

Origen, who wrote in what might be called the next generation after Tertullian (approximately 230-250), saw temptation as a constant challenge that was central to the life of humanity. Although all of the early Christian writers undoubtedly knew of the story of Jesus' temptation, Origen seems to be one of the first to discuss Jesus' relation to our temptation. In his Commentary on the Song of Songs, Origen develops the metaphor of temptation as a net,

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11. Tertullian, On Purity, in Treatises on Penance, trans. by William P. Le Saint, (Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1959), No. 28 in the Ancient Christian Writers, ed. by J. Quasten and W.J. Burghardt,(London: Longmans, Green, and Co.; Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press), p. 114 (see also pp. 28-29).
12. Tertullian, An Exhortation to Chastity, p. 20.

set to trap humans in much the same way that similar nets might trap birds or snares might trap deer:

> ...The just man, if he have fallen into sin, is commanded to 'flee as a doe from the snares, and as a bird from the nets.' The life of men...is full of snares of deadly offenses, full of the nets of fraud, which he who is called 'Nemrod, the giant hunter against the Lord,' spreads for the human race. For who is in fact that giant, save the devil, who rebels even against God? So the snares of temptations and the craftily contrived gins of the devil are called nets.[13]

The metaphors of "snares" and "nets" for temptation seem appropriate for expressing the dual nature of temptation: it both allures one to sin and tests one's commitment to the covenant with God. In this creative commentary on the relevant passage in the Song of Songs, Origen argued that the presence of these "nets" throughout life, and the likelihood that we would all be caught in them, required that "somebody should come who should be stronger than they and stand out above them and should destroy them, and thus clear the way for those who followed him." Of course the only one who could be stronger than the nets is one who is without sin, but even this must be demonstrated through a testing:

> Therefore is the Saviour also tempted by the devil before He could enter into union and alliance with the Church; so that, conquering the snares of temptations, He might look through them and through them also call her to Himself, thus teaching and showing her beyond

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13. Origen, Commentary on the Song of Songs, (Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1957), No. 26 in the Ancient Christian Writers, ed. by J. Quasten and J.C. Plumpe,(London: Longmans, Green, and Co.; Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press), p. 237. See Proverbs 1:17 and 6:5 for the net reference, and see Genesis 10:8ff. for the story of Nemrod.

> all doubt that the way to Christ leads, not through idle ease and pleasure, but through many trials and temptations.
>
> There was, therefore, none other who could overcome these nets. 'For all have sinned', as it is written; and again, as Scripture says: 'there is no just man upon earth that hath done good and hath not sinned'; and again: 'No one is free of uncleanness, not even if his life be but of one day.' Therefore our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ alone is He 'who did no sin'; but the Father 'made Him to be sin for us', that 'in the likeness of sinful flesh and of sin He might condemn sin.'
>
> So He came to these nets; but He alone could not be caught in them. Instead of that, when He has torn and trampled them, He so emboldens the Church that she too dares to trample now upon the snares, and to pass over the nets, and with all joy to say: 'Our soul has been delivered out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we are delivered.' Who rent the snare, save He alone who could not be held by it? For, although He suffered death, He did so willingly, and not as we do, by necessity of sin; for He alone was 'free among the dead'.[14]

Origen is a good illustration of the source of the Temptation Problem: the language used to describe Jesus incarnate is that he came in the "*likeness* of sinful flesh and of sin," and even the somewhat mysterious claim that God "made Him to be sin for us" maintains a certain distance (or at least the possibility of such distance) between Jesus' human nature and ours. The problem is not yet explicit, but we can see in Origen's discussion of "nets and snares" the possibility of some confusion if the point of Jesus' dual nature is pressed.

The importance of resisting temptations is stressed also by Jerome, a famous teacher and translator who lived

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14. Origen, Commentary on the Song of Songs, pp. 237-238. See Romans 3:23; Job 14:4 f.; I Peter 2:22 (citing Isaiah 53:9), II Corinthians 5:21, and Romans 8:3; Psalm 123:7; Acts 2:24; and Psalm 87:6.

from 347 until 419 or 420. Jerome is probably best known for producing the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, but he is also known for his teaching and advice on the Christian life. He points out the centrality of "tranquillity of thought" and the need for one's soul to have its "faith founded on a rock and fixed with a deep root" in order to ensure that the "billows of temptations" will not pass over one who is tempted.[15]

Palladius, writing at about the time of Jerome's death (419 or so) in his Lausiac History, mentions a number of temptations presented to him or to the monastics whose life he describes. These temptations apparently took the form of carnal desires, Ethiopian maidens, messengers with food, or onslaughts by demons. The temptations actually seemed to be invited by the monastics, who would spend years in their cells testing their ability to withstand temptation by "prayer and fasting." In short, Palladius seemed to see temptation as a combination of testing and the enticement to immoral acts.[16]

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15. Jerome, The Letters of St. Jerome, trans. by Charles C. Meirow, (Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1963), No. 33 in the Ancient Christian Writers, ed. by J. Quasten and W.J. Burghardt, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co.; Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press), p. 101. Jerome's mixed metaphor here adds a certain solidity to his point.
16. Palladius: The Lausiac History, trans. by Robert T. Meyer,(Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1965), No. 34 in the Ancient Christian Writers, ed. by J. Quasten, W.J. Burghardt, T.C. Lawler,(London: Longmans, Green, and Co.; Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press), pp. 54, 79, 82-3, 114, 189.

Some early Christians saw temptation not only as a testing but also as a reminder of the need for humility. Prosper of Aquitaine, for example, writing in about 450, follows Paul and Augustine in reminding his readers in The Call of All Nations that "obviously, there are occasions for struggle and these serve the great profit of the faithful: their weakness is buffeted that their holiness may not yield to pride."[17] Prosper points out that God's various gifts are given to be used:

> ...God does not give continence to allow a man not to resist his inordinate desires. He does not give wisdom and understanding to dispense a man from meditating on the Lord's law day and night. What can the gift of charity effect if a man is not ever animated by a desire to help others?...God's grace does not make any one proof against temptation. The Christian soldier is not equipped with heavenly weapons, both offensive and defensive, in order not to fight with the enemy; because it brings greater glory and happiness to come through battle invincible than to prove unassailable because of indolence.[18]

Maximus, a theologian and philosopher who lived from about 580-660, wrote extensively on the ascetic life. He viewed temptation as the activity of the devil, and saw Jesus' temptation as a test of Jesus' ability to "observe [the two commandments of the law], in human fashion, from beginning to end." Thus Jesus took himself out to the desert

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17. Prosper of Aquitaine, The Call of All Nations, trans. by J. Quasten,(Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1952), No. 14 in the Ancient Christian Writers, ed. by J. Quasten and J.C. Plumpe, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co.; Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press), p. 39.
18. Prosper, The Call of All Nations, pp. 150-151.

to be "tempted by himself", which activity the devil was more than happy to assist:

> ...as the devil knew that there are three things by which every human is moved - I mean food, money, and reputation, and it is by these too that he leads men down to the depths of destruction - with these same three he tempted Him in the desert.[19]

Jesus, of course, successfully resisted the temptation, but Maximus goes even further, declaring that the "wicked Pharisees and Scribes" were stirred up by the "vindictive" devil to plot against Jesus in order to make Christ hate those who schemed against Him. The devil thus tried to fool Jesus into breaking the commandment "love thy neighbor"; this, too is a form of temptation or test.[20]

In addition to Jesus' temptation, Maximus had something to say about our temptations. Just after the passages cited above, Maximus offers this admonishment:

> If you are always attentive to what has been said above [about Paul's instructions concerning struggling with temptation, in addition to Jesus' experience], you can have that awareness [of being sober minded in time of temptations, and of the schemes of the devil and his demons], but provided you understand that as you are tempted, so also your brother is tempted; that you pardon the tempted and, by refusing to respond to his trick, withstand the Tempter, who wants to bring you to a hatred of the tempted.[21]

In another of Maximus's writings, the Four Centuries on Charity, the author presents some instructions on the nature

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19. Maximus the Confessor, The Ascetic Life, trans. by Polycarp Sherwood, (Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1955), No. 21 in the Ancient Christian Writers, ed. by J. Quasten and J.C. Plumpe, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co.; Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press), p. 108-109.
20. Maximus, The Ascetic Life, p. 109-110.
21. Maximus, The Ascetic Life, p. 113.

of temptation in the monastic life and how to handle it. In Century I, for example, he enjoins the brethren not to leave the monastery in time of temptation, but rather to "nobly bear the waves of thoughts, especially those of grief and listlessness."[22] In Century II the problem of blaming the bearer of temptation is addressed; the reader is enjoined "to seek the why of it" in order to find correction, because, no matter through whom the temptation was brought, "the fact is you had to drain the wormwood of God's judgments."[23] Here, of course, temptation has the dual nature of being both a test and an inducement to some immoral or unwise act. In Century IV, Maximus points out two of the side problems connected with temptation: it can be long-lasting and it can lead to trouble with others. He notes that "the long-suffering man awaits the end of temptation and attains the triumph of perseverance," and

> If perhaps in temptation your brother insists on abusing you, do not be carried away from your charitable dispositions, suffering the same wicked demon to infest your mind. And you will not be carried away if, being reviled, you bless, being tricked, you remain well-disposed. This is the philosophic way according to Christ; who will not walk it, does not enjoy his company.[24]

Apparently Augustine and Gregory the Great discerned two kinds of temptation, temptation which tended to issue in

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22. Maximus the Confessor, The Four Centuries on Charity, trans. by Polycarp Sherwood, (Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1955), No. 21 in the Ancient Christian Writers, ed. by J. Quasten and J.C. Plumpe, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co.; Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press), p. 143.
23. Maximus, The Four Centuries on Charity, p. 160.
24. Maximus, The Four Centuries on Charity, p. 195-196.

sin and temptation which simply put to the test. In his book The Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Augustine draws a distinction between "being tempted" and "being led into temptations".[25] The first of these we might think of as external temptation, or the situation of being presented with or faced with a temptation. An obvious example of this is the set of temptations that the Devil presents to Jesus in the Wilderness. To "fall into temptation" or "to be led into temptation" describes a situation in which, according to Augustine, the temptations "are such that we cannot endure".

In a short but important passage in the City of God, Augustine seems to suggest that we ought to distinguish between normal temptations and temptations which contain an element of sin in them (most of what we would call sensual, and certainly sexual temptations, have this element of sin). It is instructive, as one reads this passage, to recall that Augustine is arguing against a class of philosophers who maintain that the "supreme good is in themselves". Some claim it is in the body or the soul, while others claim it is in pleasure or in virtue. In the passage below, then, Augustine explains that the maintenance of virtue presupposes the existence of vice within the virtuous person:

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25. Augustine, The Lord's Sermon on the Mount, trans. by John J. Jepson, (Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1956), No. 5 in Ancient Christian Writers, ed. by Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe, (Westminister, Maryland: The Newman Press), pp. 118-123.

> In fine, virtue itself, which is not among the primary objects of nature, but succeeds to them as the result of learning, though it holds the highest place among human good things, what is its occupation save to wage perpetual war with vices - not those that are outside of us, but within; not other men's, but our own - a war which is waged especially by that virtue which the Greeks call sophrosune, and we temperance, and which bridles carnal lusts, and prevents them from winning the consent of the spirit to evil deeds? For we must not fancy that there is no vice in us, when, as the apostle says, "The flesh lusteth against the spirit"[Gal. 5:17]; for to this vice there is a contrary virtue, when, as the same writer says, "The spirit lusteth against the flesh." "For these two," he says, "are contrary one to the other, so that you cannot do the things which you would." But what is it we wish to do when we seek to attain the supreme good, unless that the flesh should cease to lust against the spirit, and that there be no vice in us against which the spirit may lust? And as we cannot attain to this in the present life, however ardently we desire it, let us by God's help accomplish at least this, to preserve the soul from succumbing and yielding to the flesh that lusts against it, and to refuse our consent to the perpetration of sin. Far be it from us, then to fancy that while we were still engaged in this intestine war, we have already found the happiness which we seek to reach by victory. And who is there so wise that he has no conflict at all to maintain his vices?[26]

Aquinas interprets this passage as a clear statement that Augustine believes that "There is some sin whenever 'the desire of the flesh opposes the spirit'", from which he (Aquinas) concludes that Christ could not have been tempted in this way![27] There is significant evidence for this view of Jesus' inability to sin elsewhere in the Augustinian corpus. In Chapter XV of On Nature and Grace, written

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26. Augustine, City of God, Book XIX, Chap.IV, in Basic Writings of St. Augustine, vol. 2, ed. by Whitney J. Oates, (New York: Random House, 1948), pp. 475-476.
27. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 53, 3a.38-45, trans. by R.J. Hennessy, O.P., (New York: Blackfriars, in conjunction with McGraw-Hill Book Company and London: Eyre & Spotiswoode, 1976), p. 75, 3a.41,1.

against Pelagius and Pelagianism, Augustine makes an aside concerning Jesus:

> ...in...Scripture...it is nowhere found that any man is described as being without sin, except Him only, of whom it is plainly said, that "He knew no sin." [II Cor. 5:21] Similarly we read in the passage where the subject is concerning priests: "He was in all points tempted as we are, only without sin" [Heb. 4:15] - meaning, of course, in that flesh which bore the likeness of sinful flesh, although it was not sinful flesh; a likeness, indeed, which it would not have borne if it had not been in every other respect the same as sinful flesh.[28]

Of course Augustine stoutly denies that God has the ability to sin, and Christ, who is one with God in the Trinity, shares God's nature and thus has the same inability to sin.[29] But what is most interesting for our purposes is Augustine's reading of Hebrews 4:15. One somewhat standard way of reading this verse is to understand that while Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, he was nonetheless able to withstand all of those temptations. Augustine's comment here, however, suggests another reading. Augustine's reading seems to say that Christ was tempted in only those ways that we are that do not have as part of their temptation an element of sin. Certainly this is the way Aquinas understands him, and Aquinas cites the passage quoted above from the City of God in support of his reading of Augustine.

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28. Augustine, On Nature and Grace, in Basic Writings of St. Augustine, vol. 1, ed. by Whitney J. Oates, (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 529.
29. Augustine, On Nature and Grace, p. 556-558.

It is worth noting here that the Greek of Hebrews 4:15 does not exactly support either Augustine's reading or the more standard interpretation, which I will refer to as the "modern interpretation".[30] One issue for the modern interpretation has to do with whether this verse (as well as Hebrews 2:18) indicates that Jesus was tempted by being allured or attracted to do an immoral thing or that he was tempted by being tested or tried. Not much turns on that, however, since in either case he was tempted "in every respect as we are". Although this reading suggests a way out of the dilemma of how Jesus could be a moral model for us without being able to sin himself, that apparent "way out" actually falls prey to the same problem. Someone may claim, for example, that Jesus was tested in every way that we are, and yet he did not sin in response to any of the tests. But this reading also fails to make Jesus a real role model for any other humans, because being presented with tests when one cannot fail them is the same, morally, as being presented with attractions or allurements when one cannot actually succumb to the attraction or allure.

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30. Transliterated, the verse reads something like this: *Ou gar echomen archierea me dunamenon sumpathesai tais astheneiais hemon, pepeirasmenon de kata panta kath homoioteta choris amartais*. "Pepeirasmenon" may mean "having been tried or tested" more than "having been tempted" in the sense, suggested in Chapter One, of "attracted or allured by an immoral or unwise action". See A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament, by Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), esp. p. 662. This is not without some controversy, however.

The Augustinian reading, that Jesus was tempted (in whatever way, most likely "tested") only in those ways that are in themselves free of sin, seems plausible enough, but it also presents serious problems. Obviously no one with a necessarily morally good nature can be tempted in a way that has as part of its makeup an element of sin, so Jesus could not have been tempted in those ways, according to Augustine.[31] He was tempted, rather, in every way that we are that was logically possible for someone who was unable to sin in virtue of his divine nature. Jesus, although his flesh bore the likeness of sinful flesh, was not exactly like the rest of us who actually have "sinful flesh". As Augustine points out, this is because Jesus' "flesh" does not have the same defect that the rest of us have; that is, he was free of the taint of original sin. Because Jesus was not born of a standard human parents, he does not inherit original sin, so his "flesh" will not resemble ours in this very important (and logically necessary) way.[32]

There is, of course, a huge problem with this. That problem is that it severely limits Jesus as any sort of role

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31. See his City of God, XIX, par. 4 for a singularly unclear explanation of this position.
32. See, for example, Augustine's City of God, Book XIV, Chapter III, in the Basic Writings of St. Augustine, vol. 2, (New York: Random House, 1948), pp. 241-242: "But if anyone says that the flesh is the cause of all vices and ill conduct, inasmuch as the soul lives wickedly only because it is moved by the flesh, it is certain he has not considered the whole nature of man...For the corruption of the body, which weighs down the soul, is not the cause but the punishment of the first sin; and it was not the corruptible flesh that made the soul sinful, but the sinful soul that made the flesh corruptible."

model or exemplar for humanity. If Jesus was only tempted in certain ways, but not in others, then the claim that Jesus took on human form (and nature) is vitiated. Nor does it seem to be entirely true to the Biblical account of Jesus. Frankly, this is not much help.

In contrast to Augustine, Caesarius of Arles seemed to take a different tack to explain away the Temptation Problem. Caesarius was at some pains to explain Jesus' triumph over sin without attaching too much importance to Jesus' divine nature. For Caesarius, although he is somewhat vague in this crucial passage, Augustine apparently did not take a strong enough line:

> For this reason, then, our Lord and Saviour came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3), as the Apostle teaches, and bore all things, though without sin Himself. By taking upon Himself flesh from a sinful substance, while remaining without sin, He thus fulfilled justice and condemned sin in the body. This fact is proved by His conflict in the desert, for the Devil is not overcome by divine Majesty, but by a reminder of the commandment, by fasting, and by a legal reply. The different temptations of the Pharisees further proved it, for they often attacked our Lord. By doing good even though they were ungrateful, not resisting injury, overcoming insult with patience, and malice with kindness, all justice surely is fulfilled and every sin condemned. As a result of this, our Lord declared: "The prince of this world is coming, and in me he has nothing." (John 14:30) Therefore this is the first victory, that a body could appear sinless though taken from a sinful race. Thus, sin could be condemned in the very body in which it had thought it could reign; instead, that which had once been overcome would now conquer. If His divinity alone had been victorious, it would not have been a source of great confusion to the Devil, nor would corporeal men have had confidence in the triumph.[33]

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33. Caesarius of Arles, Sermons, vol. I, trans. by Mary Magdalene Mueller, (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1956), p. 64.

Unfortunately, Caesarius presents no defense of this claim, that it was not "divine majesty alone" that had triumphed, but something else. Surely it is not simply "a reminder of divine commandment" or a "legal reply" (or even fasting!) that enables Jesus to resist temptations that the rest of us struggle with. Rather, Caesarius seems to imply that within human flesh itself is the capability to withstand temptation, but that only Jesus has been able to tap into that source of strength or will so as to resist the temptations that any human might face. This is a position significantly different from Augustine's - and one with real promise for explaining the Temptation Problem, but so far as I can tell Caesarius does not develop it beyond the passage quoted above. In the last chapter I will return to the tension between this idea and Augustine's limitations on Jesus' temptation.

# CHAPTER 2

## ON ANSELM'S SOLUTION

As we have seen, it seems to follow from orthodox Christian doctrine that Jesus' life and example are not relevant to our human moral concerns. Jesus, in his divine nature, is essentially morally good, which means that he cannot, of necessity, perform any morally wrong action. Although he may be "like us in every respect",[1] if it is not possible for Jesus to sin he does not share at least one property that every other human has: the ability or capacity (or even the possibility) to sin. In apparent conflict with the claim about Christ's necessary moral goodness is the claim that he was also fully human; he had a human nature (or rational soul) just as every other human does. And it seems that the claim that he was tempted (Hebrews 2:17) implies that he was able to sin, or that it was possible for Jesus to sin.

After Augustine and Caesarius, little seems to have been written on this topic until the time of Anselm of Canterbury. In Chapter Ten of Book II of his Cur Deus Homo, Anselm presents two arguments that, taken together, purport to show that Jesus could and could not sin. The first of these, which we will call Boso's Argument, is uttered by Boso (named after Anselm's assistant). He argues that Jesus

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1. Hebrews 2:13; see also 4:15.

was able to lie because Jesus was able to utter words which, spoken in certain contexts, would constitute a lie. The second argument, Anselm's Reply to Boso, is based on the notion that one cannot commit certain acts unless one wills to commit those acts. Using this idea, Anselm attempts to show that Jesus cannot, in fact, sin. These arguments will be discussed in some detail below. One noticeable trait of these arguments is the small controversy that they have generated between at least two commentators on Anselm's work. Desmond Paul Henry, in his book The Logic of Saint Anselm, calls the first argument "a rather neat proof that Christ was capable of lying".[2] But Jasper Hopkins, in A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm, argues that "there is no meaningful sense in which Jesus could have lied, granted Anselm's orthodox Christology".[3]

In this chapter I will examine these two arguments in order to see whether Anselm has successfully solved the problem of Christ's ability to sin. We will see that, while Boso's Argument seems to fail, it is nonetheless based on a tantalizing intuition about Christ's capacity to perform a morally wrong action. In the latter part of the chapter I will attempt to formulate Anselm's intuition into a workable proof. First I will discuss Boso's Argument, the argument that Jesus could sin, after which I will discuss Anselm's

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2. Desmond Paul Henry, The Logic of St. Anselm, (London: Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 168.
3. Jaspar Hopkins, A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), p. 166.

Reply, the argument that Jesus could not sin. Then I will take up the possibility of restructuring Anselm's argument to see whether a successful version of it is available to us.

In the Cur Deus Homo Anselm discusses the need for a person of the "race of Adam" to make atonement for the sins of Adam and his descendants. At the beginning of Chapter Ten of Book II, he asserts that Jesus does not die as a debt for his own sins, since he has none. This is because Jesus cannot sin, of course, "for he is God". The rest of us die as a part of our own debt for Adam's sin (and our own). Thus Jesus' death can pay our debt, since he owes none.[4] This claim arouses Boso's curiosity, for he thinks he can show that Jesus could sin. It is instructive to recount Boso's speech in its entirety:

> Boso: Let me delay you a little on this point. For in either case it is no slight question with me whether it be said that he can sin or that he cannot. For if it be said that he cannot sin, it should seem hard to believe. For to say a word concerning him, not as of one who never existed in the manner we have spoken hitherto, but as of one whom we know and whose deeds we know; who, I say, will deny that he could have done many things which we call sinful? For, to say nothing of other things, how shall we say that it was not possible for him to commit the sin of lying? For, when he says to the Jews, of his Father, "If I say that I know him not, I shall be a liar, like unto you," and, in this sentence, makes use of the words: "I know him not," who says that he could not have uttered these same four words, or expressing the same thing differently, have declared, "I know him not?" Now had he done so, he would have been a liar, as he himself

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4. Anselm of Canterbury, Cur Deus Homo, in S.N. Deane, trans., St. Anselm: Basic Writings, (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1962), pp. 250-252.

> says, and therefore a sinner. Therefore, since he could do this, he could sin.[5]

We can tentatively formulate this argument as follows:

Boso's Argument:

(1) Jesus uttered the words "I know Him not" (where "Him" refers to God) as part of a certain sentence.
(2) If (1), then he could have uttered the words "I know Him not" as an independent declaration.
(3) If Jesus could have uttered the words "I know Him not" as an independent declaration, then Jesus could lie.
(4) If Jesus could lie, then Jesus could sin.
(5) Therefore Jesus could sin.

Premise (1) is taken from John 8:55; it refers to a particular sentence (actually, part of a sentence) that was reportedly uttered by Jesus. We are to understand that the sentence "I know him (the Father) not", if uttered by Jesus, is false. Premise (2) simply says that, if Jesus could utter these words under the conditions of (1), then he could utter them under other conditions. One example of such other conditions is an independent utterance of the sentence "I know him not". Premise (3) claims that Jesus' ability to utter the independent sentence referred to above amounts to the ability to lie. If Jesus could perform even this one sin, then it can be said truly of him that he could sin.

D.P. Henry, in The Logic of St. Anselm, refers to Boso's Argument (as mentioned above) as a "rather neat proof that Christ was capable of lying".[6] It is incorrect to suggest that Henry analyzed this particular passage in any

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5. Anselm, Cur Deus Homo, p. 251-252.
6. Henry, The Logic of St. Anselm, p. 168.

way; he seems to give it this endorsement simply on face value. Here is his comment:

> ...Since (Jesus) asserted (concerning God the Father), 'If I say to you that I know Him not, then I will be a liar like you'[7], and this assertion actually involves the lying words 'I know Him not', there can be no doubt as to Christ's capacity to utter them; hence Christ could lie.[8]

But there seem to be some problems with this assessment. Christ's capacity to utter the crucial words is not in doubt; certainly Christ could utter any of the words his Palestinian contemporaries could utter. Just what it means to say that the words are "lying words" is unclear; indeed, it is not at all clear that "words" can be accurately described with the adjective "lying". It does seem, however, that Henry does not want to claim (nor does Anselm) that "lying words" constitute a lie. Thus almost whatever the phrase "lying words" turns out to mean, it need not follow that the capacity or ability to utter them is the same thing as the capacity or ability to lie. Since Henry has no more than this to say on the argument, I will proceed to Hopkins in order to examine Boso's Argument, as well as Henry's endorsement of it, more fully.

Hopkins fashions a criticism of Boso's Argument based in large part on what we will call Anselm's Reply (see below). Central to Anselm's Reply is the claim that if someone cannot will to perform a certain action then he or she cannot perform that action.

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7. John 8:55.
8. Henry, The Logic of St. Anselm, p. 169.

Here is the relevant passage from Hopkins:

> [Anselm] is really saying something like this: "Although the God-man was conditionally able to tell a lie, He could never actually tell a lie, because fulfillment of the condition under which He could do so is logically impossible (by definition the God-man cannot will a lie)". But because of this impossible condition, Anselm should say outright that Jesus could not have sinned by telling a lie - instead of maintaining that he was able to tell a lie but not able to will a lie. For if someone cannot will a lie, then he can in no sense tell a lie. (This principle holds true irrespective of the reason why such a person cannot will a lie).[9]

Hopkins's point seems to be this. Boso's claim that Jesus can lie is simply false. This is because in order to lie one must will to lie. It is not possible, however, for the God-man to will to lie, since he is essentially morally perfect, and to will a lie would be a moral imperfection. So he simply cannot lie. It is not possible for him to lie.

Although this seems, at first, to be a reasonable and telling objection to Boso's Argument, it is not entirely clear which premise, exactly, Hopkins is rejecting. He seems, actually, to be simply rejecting the conclusion, which is hardly a telling objection. A somewhat more careful (or, perhaps, generous) reading, however, might indicate that Hopkins is pointing out that the consequent of premise (4) is impossible. Hopkins is not entirely clear about this in his discussion of Boso's Argument. He claims:

> ...there is no meaningful sense in which Jesus could have lied, granted Anselm's orthodox Christology.[10]

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9. Hopkins, Companion, pp. 164-165.
10. Hopkins, Companion, p. 166.

Anselm's orthodox Christianity has as one of its tenets, of course, that it is impossible for Christ to sin. Since willing to sin is also a sin, it is even impossible for Christ to will to sin. Let us grant for now that we will put aside the problems with the potential differences between claims about Christ and claims about Jesus. Hopkins denies that there is any meaningful sense "in which Jesus could have lied" and, to be fair, if that is true then there is no meaningful sense in which Christ could have lied, either.

Hopkins denies that Jesus could have lied by saying that it was impossible for Jesus to will a lie, because even Anselm claims that Jesus could not have willed to sin. Christ, because of the moral perfection of his fully divine nature, could not have willed to lie.[11] Certainly, this seems plausible, since to will a lie is a sin every bit as much as actually lying (we have hinted at this earlier, where we discussed the claim that Christ could not intend to lie). If we understand there to be no distinction between Christ and Jesus for Anselm, then Jesus does not have the capacity to will a lie. Hopkins' point is that the impossibility of Jesus willing to lie precludes the possibility of his actually lying. So Jesus can have no capacity to lie if it is not possible that he actually lie.

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11. See Cur Deus Homo, Chapter 10.

In fact, as Hopkins notes,[12] Anselm tacitly acknowledges this problem:

> So we can say of Christ, that he could lie, so long as we understand, if he chose to do so. And since he could not lie unwillingly and could not wish to lie, none the less can it be said that he could not lie.[13]

We will discuss this more below. Hopkins sees it as the primary problem for Anselm that he (Anselm) does not acknowledge that this argument refutes Boso's Argument.

There also seems to be a better way to reject Boso's Argument. Premise (3) seems questionable, at best. Henry defends it in the quotation above. It is not entirely clear what Henry means there by "lying words". One reasonable assumption would be that "lying words" refers to what we usually mean when we say "a lie"; that is, it means something relevantly like "a false (or, perhaps, misleading) statement knowingly uttered with the intent to deceive". But it seems certain that this is not what Henry means when he uses the term "lying words" to refer to the phrase "I know him not" that Jesus utters as part of a longer statement. It is clear in that case that Jesus does not utter the words "I know him not" with the intent to deceive. So "lying words" must mean something else.

A second possibility is that Henry intends "lying words" to mean something relevantly like "false statement", provided that we understand that to mean a false statement uttered under certain conditions. That is, when Jesus utters

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12. Hopkins, Companion, p. 166.
13. Anselm, Cur Deus Homo, p. 253.

the "lying words", "I know Him not," he is actually uttering something that, under certain conditions, is false. On this view intent is not relevant. The argument that follows from this is that if Jesus can utter a statement that is false under certain conditions, then he can lie. In fact, of course, he has already uttered the statement "I know Him not", which is false under certain conditions, so he is obviously able to do so. It is the case, then, that he can lie.

The problem with this argument is, of course, that the simple utterance of a statement that would be false under certain conditions does not imply the ability to tell a lie. Nor would the ability to utter such a statement. Someone might, for example, utter a false statement unknowingly or mistakenly. That is not a lie, nor would such utterances imply the ability to lie. Anselm, or Henry, may respond that "lying words" are not simply untrue or false statements. They are, these objectors might say, false statements uttered or written with the knowledge that they are false. If I were to say "School is closed for the day", knowing that to be false, then I would be speaking "lying words", according to this objection: uttering or somehow communicating a false statement even though I know it to be false. This, my Anselmian objectors claim, is what Jesus was capable of: he could utter a false statement knowing that it was, in fact, false. He could say, for example, "I know Him not" (referring to the Father), knowing that it was false.

Thus he was capable of lying. But this possibility fails as well. There are certainly lots of circumstances where someone's knowing utterance of a false statement does not constitute lying. In the case above, I might know that school is not, in fact closed for the day. But simply uttering the statement "School is closed for the day" does not, by itself, constitute either a lie or the ability to lie. If I am standing in an empty room where no one can hear me, for example, then it does not seem that simply uttering those words constitutes a lie. Nor does such an action imply that I am capable of lying. In that case I have knowingly uttered a false statement, but I have not lied. Hopkins makes this point as follows:

> Anselm, through Boso, seems to be thinking of a lie as simply the utterance of a false statement, so that had Jesus ever uttered the words "I do not know the Father" and only these words, he would have been lying. Yet the contrary is evident: Jesus could have spoken these words without lying, for He could have said them hypothetically. If His accusers had asked, "What would you have to say in order to be a liar like us?" He might didactically have answered, "I do not know the Father." But with these words he would not have been telling a lie even though he would have been giving an example of a lie by saying something false.[14]

Where Henry understands Boso's Argument as claiming that, since Jesus was capable of uttering "lying words", then he was capable of lying, he has defended an implication that is not, in fact, a valid inference. This glosses over a serious mistake in Boso's reasoning. That mistake is to

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14. Hopkins, Companion, pp. 165-166.

suppose that the ability to utter a false statement, even knowingly, implies the ability to lie.

It is probably most accurate, as we suggested above, to characterize a "lie" as something like "a false statement that is knowingly uttered with the intention to deceive". Thus when Boso claims that Jesus could lie, he is claiming that Jesus could knowingly utter a false statement with the intent to deceive. But this does not follow from the claim that Jesus was capable of knowingly uttering a false statement. This problem is distinct from Hopkins's criticism that the impossibility of Jesus' willing to lie contradicts Boso's claim that Jesus could lie. Even before Anselm's Reply (on which Hopkins's criticism is based) Boso claims that if Jesus could utter words that, when spoken in certain circumstances, are untrue, then he was capable of telling a lie. But that is not true, since utterance of a false sentence (even the knowing utterance of a false sentence) is not sufficient for the utterance of a lie. Thus the ability to utter such words does not seem to imply the ability to lie. It seems, rather, that willing - or at least intending - to lie is a necessary condition for telling a lie (it is also a condition that is, apparently not possible for Jesus). All this is to point out that premise (3) of Boso's Argument fails. The problem here is that the ability to lie does not follow from the ability to utter knowingly a statement that would be false under certain conditions (nor does it follow from the ability knowingly to utter a false

statement). It seems that Boso must demonstrate Jesus' capacity to intend to deceive in order to demonstrate Jesus' capacity to lie. Thus Boso's Argument does not, in fact, show that Jesus could sin.

In what seems to be a response to Boso's Argument, Anselm presents a simple reply. He does not intend his reply to show that Boso is incorrect, but simply to show that it could be truly said of Jesus both that he was able to sin and not able to sin. So Anselm's Reply is not intended to be a refutation of Boso, but simply the second part of a two-part proof of the claim that Jesus both could and could not sin. Here is the argument:

> The exercise of every personal capacity is dependent on the will. For when I say that I can speak or walk, it is implicitly understood that I can do these things only if I will to do so. If willingness is not implicitly understood in this fashion, then it is no longer a matter of power, but rather of necessity. For when I say that I can be unwillingly dragged or conquered, this is not because of a power on my part, but on account of a necessity and power which reside with some other being. Indeed, 'I can be dragged (or overcome)' just means 'Some other being can drag (or overcome) me'. We can hence say of Christ that he could tell a lie, provided it is implicitly understood that he could do so only if he willed to do so. And since he could not tell a lie without being willing to do so, but at the same time could not be willing to do so, he can equally be properly said to have been unable to tell a lie.[15]

Most of the first part of this passage is actually a defense for a basic modus tollens argument. The argument itself can be stated as follows:

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15. Anselm, Cur Deus Homo, 255-256 (see also pp. 167-168 in Henry, The Logic of St. Anselm).

Anselm's Reply:

(1) If Jesus could lie, then he could will to tell a lie.
(2) Jesus could not will to tell a lie.
(3) Therefore Jesus could not lie.

This argument is valid (as above). Its soundness is based on the following defense. The first premise is a bit tricky. Anselm's claim is this, "We can hence say of Christ that He could tell a lie, provided it is implicitly understood that he could do so only if he willed to do so." The apparently obvious formulation is something like, "Jesus could tell a lie only if he willed to tell a lie." This sounds plausible, at first, but it seems unlikely that Anselm meant to claim that willing to do something is a necessary condition for the ability to do that thing. I have the ability to throw a rock through my neighbor's window (I could throw the rock), but I do not now (and hopefully never will) will to throw a rock through my neighbor's window. My willingness to do that action is in no way a necessary condition for my ability to do it. It seems more plausible (and certainly fairer to Anselm) to understand this sentence to mean something like, "If Jesus could lie, then he could will to tell a lie."

Thus premise (1) simply claims that willing a lie is a necessary condition for actually telling a lie, not for the capacity to lie (as it might appear to one on first reading). Premise (2) is the simple Christological claim that Christ could not lie, based on the standard orthodox view of moral perfection as one of the attributes of Christ.

It seems likely that some of the confusion about the first premise stems from a traditional understanding of necessity or what "must be". Such a traditional understanding of necessity might have read something like this: a thing is necessary if it cannot be otherwise. In this sense of necessity the necessity of Christ's moral goodness suggests not only the impossibility of his sinning but also an inability to sin on his part. Anselm was not unaware of the difficulty of ascribing the lack of certain abilities to God (or to Jesus), and he discussed this subject with some care.[16] But if we say that it was necessary that Christ not lie, by which we mean that he could not do otherwise, we seem to be claiming that he was unable to lie or to will to lie; that is, he did not even have the capacity (some would say power) to lie (or to sin). From this understanding of the necessity of Jesus' moral goodness it seems to follow quite naturally that the only way it could be otherwise is if Jesus did have the capacity to will a lie. So it must be the case that he did not have such a capacity. Thus Anselm (and others) conclude from the notion that Jesus could not do something- in the strong sense that he not only did not but could not will to do it- that he did not have the capacity to do it.

It is not so clear, however, that because Christ did not ever will to lie that it is false that he could will to lie (that he had the capacity to will a lie). Let us assume

16. See, for example, Cur Deus Homo, II, 17.

that Christ was fully human and that he never married and never engaged in an act of sexual intercourse. Let us further assume that those are essential properties of Christ (that may be controversial, but let us grant them for the sake of argument). Let us suppose that Christ had the capacity to father a child biologically. Yet he did not father any children; in fact, it was not possible that he do so, given his essential properties. But it would be wrong to claim that there is no meaningful sense in which Jesus could have fathered a child. Certainly there is the intuitively challenging sense where he had the capacity but always chose not to do so (in every possible world he does not, in fact, father a child). Even though he does not ever father a child, it does not follow that he does not have the capacity. It seems, then, false to claim that because he did not father a child in any possible world that he could not.

Perhaps there is a way to redo Anselm's argument that avoids the two problems of Boso's Argument while retaining something of Anselm's original intent. The argument that Jesus cannot sin because he cannot will to sin seems to be successful (granted Jesus' necessary moral goodness), without any major problems, but it is perhaps more difficult to establish that Jesus can sin in some meaningful way.

One intriguing possibility follows from some recent work on the limits of the claims about what is impossible for God. On this view it is true that God is essentially morally good, so it is necessary that God is morally good.

It is impossible, then, that God perform a morally wrong act. Using standard modal semantics this means that there is no possible world where God performs a wrong act, or sins.

The same is normally claimed of Jesus. Jesus the Christ is essentially morally good, which means that there is no possible world where Jesus sins. It seems, then, that Jesus does not have the ability to sin.

The problem facing someone like Anselm who wants to argue both for Jesus' ability to sin and his essential goodness is what we know, today, as a difficulty associated with possible worlds, necessity, and ability or possibility. Anselm's Reply, as seen above, in our standard modal semantics, rules out any possible world where Jesus sins. The argument is simply this:

> (1) Christ is necessarily morally good.
> (2) If (1), then there is no possible world where Christ sins.
> (3) If there is no possible world where Christ sins, <u>then it is impossible that Christ commits a sin.</u>
> (4) Therefore it is impossible that Christ commits a sin.

Any argument that Christ can sin is going to have to cope with this one, somehow (as Hopkins points out). It is based on the same points as Anselm's reply, which Hopkins uses to refute Boso's Argument.

One of Anselm's mistakes in trying to show that Christ can sin (as mentioned above) seems to have been the attempt to derive Christ's ability to sin from some other abilities, such as the ability to utter a false statement or the ability to utter a statement that, given the intent to lie,

would be a lie. But he is unable to show, from this ability, that Jesus ever had - or might have - the intent to lie or sin.

But here is a curious feature of Anselm's argumentation. He argues (as almost anyone who has ever considered this subject does) from Jesus' divinity to the impossibility that Jesus sin. The curious part is that he does not then argue from Jesus' humanity to Jesus' ability to sin. By all accounts (all orthodox accounts) Jesus was fully human: he was born of a woman, he ate and slept normally, he had growing pains, he walked and talked as any of us do, and he died. Further, the traditional version of the doctrine of the incarnation holds that Jesus had two natures in one *hypostasis* or person. He had both natures fully, however, and it is at least true about human nature that someone who has it has the capacity to understand and to make moral decisions. It seems true that for someone to have human nature fully then that person must be capable of performing (or at least have the capacity to perform) an immoral action.

Anselm seems to have had some intuition concerning the need to argue for Jesus' ability to sin from some aspect of Jesus' earthly existence or human nature. That gives us the possibility to construct an argument like the following:

Jesus Can Sin I:

(1) Jesus was fully human.
(2) Someone who is fully human has the capacity to sin.
(3) If (1) and (2), then Jesus had the capacity to sin.
(4) Therefore Jesus had the capacity to sin.

The traditional objection to an argument of this kind (or even against this particular one) has been that it is simply false that Jesus had the capacity to sin because it was necessary that Jesus be morally good. Since it was necessary that he be good then it was impossible that he sin, and if it was impossible that he sin he cannot be said to have a capacity to sin.

In a fascinating article, however, Thomas Morris has pointed out that the claim that it is impossible that God sin does not imply the claim that God does not have the ability to sin.[17] Morris gives the following three sentences:

(1) God cannot sin.
(2) It is impossible that God sin.
(3) God lacks the power to sin.

Morris takes (1) to be "a commitment of traditional theism." He then makes the following point:

> ...Many... seem to understand (1), which is a commitment of traditional theism, to be equivalent in meaning to (3), which seems clearly to indicate that God lacks some power ordinary human beings in fact have. But (3) is not an accurate paraphrase of (1), nor is it even entailed by (1). As is now well known, the little word 'can' can serve many different functions, and so, accordingly, 'cannot' cannot always be taken to mean the same thing. Often, when we say something of the form "S cannot do A", we do mean to say of some

17. Thomas V. Morris, "Perfection and Power", in Thomas V. Morris, ed., Anselmian Explorations, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press: 1987), pp. 70-75.

> individual that it lacks some power. But nothing of the sort is meant when the theist utters (1). (1) is intended only to convey (2), not (3).[18]

Morris continues on here to make a point similar to the one I intended to make above. Mine was that the claim that it is impossible that God sin in some way does not entail that God does not have the ability to perform a sinful act, in the sense that God does not have that capacity. Morris's is that there is no such thing as a

> ...distinct power to sin, no power the exercise of which is, in itself, sufficient for doing evil or sinning. And only if there were would (3), the proposition that God lacks the power to sin, follow from (1), the proposition that God cannot sin.[19]

This is especially interesting in the case of lying. We have said that the ability to tell a lie is the ability to knowingly utter a false statement with the intent to deceive. Let us grant that God can utter statements (or at least that God has some relevant analogous capacity). My claim is that God does have the ability to knowingly utter a false statement with the intent to deceive. But Anselm would object, most likely, that such a thing cannot be, because God is unable to have such an intent (to have such an intent would be a sin in itself, and it is impossible that God form evil intentions because God cannot will to sin).

But here we have run smack into the same problem again. God cannot will to sin - in this case, to form the intent to deceive - because it is impossible that God sins. But that simply means that there is no possible world where God wills

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18. Morris, in Anselmian Explorations, p. 72.
19. Morris, in Anselmian Explorations, p. 74.

to deceive. This does not imply any lack of the capacity to will to deceive; rather, it implies something like Morris's claim, "It is necessarily the case that [God] never uses his perfect power [in] order to sin". To the objection that the most powerful God is one who cannot do wrong, it seems an obvious answer that the God who has the capacity to perform some wrong moral act and never does so has at least some advantage, in terms of power, over the one who is unable to do anything but the "right thing".

Morris concludes his article with a tantalizing discussion of this claim:

(7) God could not do evil even if he intended to.[20]

He suggests that this indicates "a lack of power" on God's part "rather than a fixity or firmness of will on the part of God" with respect to divine sinlessness. He further suggests that we understand this claim

> ...as a subjunctive conditional about God with a necessarily false antecedent which, on a standard construal of such statements, should come out true. In so far as theists are committed to judging it false, they are committed to rejecting the standard semantics which assigns it the contrary truth value.[21]

But this is not exactly an accurate picture of the semantics of such sentences. It is true that the subjunctive conditional sentences with an impossible antecedent are judged, by convention, to be true. So the following is true, on this construal:

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20. Morris, in Anselmian Explorations, p. 75.
21. Morris, in Anselmian Explorations, p. 75.

(8) If God were to intend to do evil, he would not be able to do evil.

But the following subjunctive conditional would also be true using the same semantic principle:

(9) If God were to intend to do evil, he would be able to do evil.

The antecedent is impossible in this sentence, so we must judge it to be true as well if we are to follow the rule we used for (8). And this doesn't seem to get us anywhere.

It is compatible with some standard claims about God's omnipotence (and perhaps even God's almightiness) that God is able to do anything that God wills. It seems to be sensible to claim that includes the ability to lie if God so wills, or to punish Israel too harshly if God so wills, etc. That God does not ever will such an action does nothing to refute the claim that God could do those actions if he willed to. Suppose we accept the thesis that there are no possible worlds where God wills to perform an evil action. It is impossible, then, that God so will. That does not imply that God lacks the capacity to will an evil action. Without such an implication it is both meaningful and correct to argue that (9) is true and (8) is false.

We can construct a similar argument for Jesus. The goal is to defend Jesus' ability to perform some sinful action (in the sense of capacity to sin) while also defending the impossibility that Jesus sin (in the sense of there being no possible world where he performs a sinful act). The argument

that Jesus cannot sin is a simple one; Anselm has already produced it. Here is our modern version:

Jesus Cannot Sin

(1) If Jesus Christ can perform a morally wrong action, then he can will a morally wrong action.
(2) It is not possible that Jesus Christ will a morally wrong action.
3) Therefore it is not possible that Jesus Christ can perform a morally wrong action.

This is a simple modus tollens argument where the consequent of the first premise is necessarily false. It is thus valid to conclude that the antecedent is necessarily false. As long as we grant the assumption that Jesus, because of his divine nature, is essentially morally good, this argument is also sound.

Of course the matching argument is somewhat more difficult. Here is one possibility:

Jesus Can Sin II

(1) If Jesus had the physical capacity to have sexual intercourse, then Jesus had the capacity to commit adultery.
(2) If Jesus had the capacity to commit adultery then Jesus had the capacity to perform a morally wrong action.
(3) Jesus had the physical capacity to have sexual intercourse.
(4) Therefore Jesus had the capacity to commit a morally wrong action.

I do not intend this argument to be shocking. Unfortunately this particular action affords a vivid example of something that Jesus clearly had the capacity to do, given that he was fully human, which, in the right circumstances, would have been a morally wrong thing to do - a sin. Now of course the objection will be raised that,

while Jesus could will to have sexual intercourse (as long as there was nothing sinful about it), that does not imply that he could will to commit adultery. This resembles the discussion above about whether the ability to utter a sentence that, under certain conditions, is false, implies the ability to lie. In particular it is not clear that this argument shows anything more than that Jesus had the physical capabilities needed for adultery. In fact, it seems that this argument contains the same problem as Boso's Bumble, in that it seems to suggest that we may infer from the apparent capacity to perform a certain kind of action the ability to will a particular performance of that action that is immoral. This is dubious support, at best, for the inference that Jesus could, in fact, commit a sin.

Perhaps there is a better alternative. It seems that we need some undeniable trait (and, apparently, a necessary one) that Jesus had in common with other humans that is sufficient for Jesus to possess the ability to sin. But there is such a trait.

Jesus Can Sin III

(1) If Jesus had the same human nature as Adam, then he had the capacity to perform a morally wrong action.
(2) If Jesus had the capacity to perform a morally wrong action, then Jesus could perform a morally wrong action.
(3) Jesus had the same human nature as Adam.
(4) Therefore Jesus could perform a morally wrong action.

This argument is valid. I believe its soundness is defensible as follows. Adam did not possess or have original

sin. But he clearly had the capacity to sin. Anselm locates (so to speak) this capacity in the rational will.[22] The rest of us are tainted with original sin, but we also have the capacity to commit our own sins. Jesus had a human rational will that could make choices. Just as Adam could choose to sin, so could Jesus. Jesus does not so choose, but he had the capacity to choose to sin because he had a human, rational will.

This argument has some distinct advantages. One of them is that it allows for a principle of property of Jesus that will distinguish him from Adam and explain the difference without taking anything away from Jesus' human nature. Otherwise he would be less than human, or not quite human, or fully divine and not fully human: all of these possibilities constitute one heresy or another. Another advantage of the argument is that it does not depend on Jesus' ability to perform some action that might, in the right circumstances, be an immoral action. It depends rather on a feature of Jesus' human nature to provide the capacity to sin in some way.

Unfortunately, there is one serious problem with the argument that Jesus has the capacity to perform a sinful act (the same problem seems to exist for the argument that God has such a capacity). If we claim that Jesus has the capacity to sin, then at any world where he chooses not to

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22. Anselm of Canterbury, The Virgin Conception and Original Sin, part III, in Eugene R. Fairweather, ed., A Scholastic Miscellany, (New York: The MacMillan Company: 1970), p. 186.

sin he could have chosen otherwise; that is, if he can choose not to perform a sinful action then he can choose to perform that action. Another way of putting this is to say that it was possible that he perform that action. But as soon as we put it that way it seems clear that, at every world where Jesus can choose between performing a sinful action or not, there is a possible world where Jesus performs a sinful action. That possible world is always the one he does not choose, but there is still a possible world in which Jesus performs a morally wrong action. Otherwise it makes little (if any) sense to say that he "chose" not to sin. But if there is a possible world where Jesus sins, then it is not true that he is essentially morally good.[23]

It might be claimed, in response to this, that it still seems to follow that an omnipotent God who can do whatever he wills can still be essentially good. The problem here is how to evaluate such a claim. If we say that God has the capacity to intend evil, it seems that such a capacity calls for some possible world where it is exercised. This is the standard view of capacity or power. So we say that God has the capacity to intend to do evil only if he so wills. In order to determine the truth of this claim we go to the world where God wills to intend an evil action and see whether he does, then, so intend. But there can be no such world because of God's essential moral goodness. We then

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23. I am indebted to Ed Gettier for suggesting some possible implications of a claim that Jesus "chose" not to sin.

reply, "But if there were such a world, God could do what God wills to, there." Then, of course, we go to the closest world where God wills to intend to do evil. But, again, there is no such world, and if there were such a possible world, there would then exist a possible world where God sins.

It is not clear how to break out of this morass. It seems unlikely, in fact, that we can break out. What we are left with is the tantalizing intuition on Anselm's part, that Jesus' human nature seems to endow him with some abilities or powers that entitle us to say that he can sin. But the impossibility of his sinning seems to cut off every suggestion of such possibility.

We are left, then, with no solution to the problem mentioned at the start of the chapter. In fact, it seems that something has to give. It may be possible to claim something less than essential moral goodness, either for God or Jesus or both. Or it may be that our understanding of capacity needs to be stretched a bit, or our understanding of necessity changed a bit, for beings such as God and Christ. Perhaps the problem lies in our understanding of "essential" properties. Can God have capacities, abilities, or powers that God never exercises (at any possible world)? Can Jesus? We are left, at least for now, with the apparent incompatibility of Jesus' two natures. The fact of his human nature seems to support the claim that he had the capacity to sin, while the fact of his divine nature seems to support

a direct refutation of such a claim. Anselm's solution to the Temptation Problem, in the form of Boso's Argument and Anselm's Reply, fails. This is because Boso's Argument fails. Even Anselm's "tantalizing intuition" that something about Jesus' human nature seems to justify the claim that he can sin, does not, as far as I am able to tell, supply an answer.

## CHAPTER 3

## ON AQUINAS'S SOLUTION

Thomas Aquinas, like Augustine and Anselm before him, taught that Jesus was a model or moral example for Christians. Aquinas, to cite only one passage, asserted that "Christ undertook our disabilities...to become for us an example of virtue".[1] Aquinas was, of course, a staunch defender of the notion that Jesus possessed two natures in one person, or supposit.[2] As we have seen, however, these two claims seem to present at least one potential difficulty. We have called this difficulty the Temptation Problem. It rests on the apparent incompatibility of divine nature and human nature. Of particular interest is the question of how Jesus can be "an example of virtue" for human beings when, because of his divine nature, it was impossible for him to sin.

Aquinas tackles this problem directly in at least three places in the Summa Theologiae. He addresses, among other issues, the questions of whether there was any sin in

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1. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, volume 49, The Grace of Christ, 3a. 7-15, trans. with notes by Liam G. Walsh, O.P., (New York and London: Blackfriars, in conjunction with McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, and Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1974); 3a.15,1, p. 191.
2. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, volume 48, The Incarnate Word, 3a. 1-6, trans. by R.J. Hennessey, O.P., (New York and London: Blackfriars, in conjunction with McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, and Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1976), p.47, 3a.2,3.

Christ, whether there was the "spark" of sin in Christ, and whether the temptation of Jesus was fitting. First I will examine Aquinas's discussion of whether there was any sin in Christ. This provides some useful background for the other two subjects. The first of these, whether Jesus had a "spark" of sin, raises some problems with Aquinas's defense of the "two natures" view of the Incarnation. The second, on whether Jesus' temptation was fitting, is the occasion for serious doubts about the full humanity of Aquinas's Jesus.

In 3a.15,1, Aquinas discusses some arguments that purport to show that there was sin in Christ. The first quotes Psalm 21, "O God, my God, look upon me; Why hast thou forsaken me? Far from my salvation are the words of my sins," which are the words Jesus is reported to have spoken on the cross. Aquinas dismisses this as a case where Jesus, the head of the church, is speaking for all its members, who were sinners.[3] In the light of what is said below, we will see that this argument might warrant more serious consideration, but Aquinas does not treat it as serious evidence of sin, or even the possibility thereof, in Jesus.

Aquinas does treat seriously the claim that Jesus, who was fully human, was like every other human in that he was descended from Adam. Aquinas presents his argument as follows:

> Again, in Romans Paul says that "all men sinned in Adam"; because that is, they were in him as in the one

3. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,1, p. 189.

> from whom they took their origin. But Christ also took his origin from Adam. Therefore he sinned in him.[4]

In order to reply to this argument, Aquinas draws a distinction between the way that Christ was in Adam and the way the rest of us are in Adam, based on an earlier idea of Augustine's. Aquinas's reply is curious, however, because of the effort he expends to establish Christ's humanity outside, as it were, the lineage of Adam:

> As Augustine says, Christ was not in Adam or in the other patriarchs in every way that we were. We were in Adam both by reason of the fertilizing principle and by reason of our bodily material. As Augustine himself puts it, "There is in the seed of man both a visible bodiliness and an invisible principle; and both are derived from Adam. Now Christ took the visible material of his flesh from the flesh of the virgin; but the principle of his conception did not come from the male seed but from something entirely different, something from above." (De Genesi ad Litt. X,20) Therefore, Christ was not in Adam by reason of the fertilizing principle, but only in his bodily material. He did not receive human nature from Adam in an active sense, but only in a material sense; in the active sense he received it from the Holy Spirit- just as Adam himself got his body materially from the dust of the earth but actively from God. And for this reason Christ did not sin in Adam, in whom he pre-existed only in a material sense.[5]

This seems to be a fairly neat way of answering the problem of how Christ, who took on human nature after Adam, avoids the "stain" of original sin. That "stain", as it is explained in this passage, is sperm-specific. Since the original sin was Adam's, it is passed on by Adam and all the other fathers in history to their children. But Jesus did not have a human father to pass on the "stain" as part of the "fertilizing principle" the way the rest of us do; his

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4. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,1, pp. 189-190.
5. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,1, p. 193.

humanness is passed to him actively from Mary, but even then only "materially". The "fertilizing principle" he receives is from the Holy Spirit much the same way that Adam receives his body materially from dust but gets his "fertilizing principle" from God.

Of course one question that must be addressed here is how Jesus is different from Adam, given the explanation above. Adam does not receive any sperm-connected principle; like Jesus, his "fertilizing" or active principle comes from one member of the Trinity. Augustine does not seem to see this problem in his explanation, and Aquinas is also silent on the subject. But it does seem that whatever property Adam had that enabled him to sin was not passed on by "male seed"; rather, Adam was created with that property. For Jesus to be fully human it seems that he must have the same property, yet it appears that he does not. Christ is, perhaps, differentiated from the rest of humanity in this way (that he was not brought into being as a result of "male seed"), and therefore he does not have the predisposition that the rest of us have to sin, but he is not differentiated from Adam by this explanation. Adam, of course, was able to sin, but Jesus is not. Apparently Jesus' divine nature prevents him from sinning. But that claim, as we shall see below, has its own problems.

The next argument has to do with the claim that Jesus was intended to be an example to those who are tempted. The argument here is based on a text from Hebrews:

> Furthermore, the apostle says in Hebrews that "Christ, because he himself has suffered and been tempted, is able to help those who are tempted." (Hebrews 2:18) But we need his help above all against sin. Therefore it would seem that sin was to be found in him.[6]

The argument here goes something like this. Christ is claimed to help the rest of humanity in its temptation because he, too, has been tempted. The same must be true of sin. Therefore Christ must have sinned. Aquinas's response to this seems, at first, to be a bit misguided. He claims that Christ's temptation (as well as his suffering) is made as a reparation for us. Now it is clear, and coherent, to claim that Jesus suffered as a reparation for our sins. And it is clear, or at least sensible, to claim that the person who is to suffer for us ought to be free from guilt himself (or herself). If this were not the case, then this person would be paying for his or her own sins as well as (or instead of) for ours. But it is not clear how Christ's temptation could serve as a reparation for the rest of us. Here is Aquinas's response to the argument above:

> In his temptation and suffering Christ helped us by making reparation for us. But sin does not contribute to reparation; it rather impedes it, as has been pointed out (3a.14,1). And therefore he ought not to have had any sin but rather to be entirely innocent of it. Otherwise the punishment he suffered would have been due to him for his own sin.[7]

One possible answer for Aquinas to use against the charge that this reply is misguided is that the person making reparation for our sins must be tempted, as we are,

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6. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,1, p. 191.
7. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,1, p. 193.

and resist the temptation, as we do not. It is only in that case that it may be claimed that the punishment such a person receives is not for his own sins but only for the sins of others. Someone who is tempted but does not sin, but who is punished as though he (or she) did sin, makes the most thorough reparation for those of us who are tempted and do sin. Further, such a person serves as an example to the rest of us. Aquinas does not clearly point out, however, that the help we receive (or even need) with temptation is therefore different from the help we need with sin. We will discuss this more below under the heading of temptation.

The fourth argument for the conclusion that there was sin in Christ is a textual one based on II Corinthians:

> Again, in II Corinthians (5:21) we read that, "For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin." But whatever God makes is real. Hence there was really sin in Christ.[8]

Aquinas, in his response to this argument, offers a textual "explanation" not unlike the reasoning he uses to respond to the quotation from Psalm 21. He suggests several readings of this text based on Biblical parallels:

> God "made Christ to be sin", not by making him a sinner but by making him a victim for sin. There is a parallel in Hosea (4:8), where the priests are said to "feed on the sin of the people" because according to the law they would eat the victims offered for sin. In the same sense we have in Isaiah (53:6), "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all", meaning that he gave him up to be a victim for the sins of all men. Or "made him to be sin" could mean "in the likeness of sinful flesh", as in Romans (8:3). And this would be because of the vulnerable and mortal body which he took on.

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8. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,1, p. 191.

These are really arguments that seem intended to explain away a challenging or undesirable interpretation of sacred texts, so I will not deal with them here. It does seem, however, that both the quotation from Psalm 21 and this quotation from II Corinthians have a possible reading in which they claim that Jesus had the same condition of sin or sinfulness or, perhaps, the possibility of sinning that the rest of us have. This is at once an obvious reading of those texts and also the most difficult to accept, in the sense that this reading requires a severely different understanding of Christ from the one Aquinas appears to be arguing for here.

The final argument that Aquinas presents in favor of the claim that there was sin in Christ is the following:

> Finally, Augustine says, "In the man Christ the Son of God offered to us as an example" (De Agone Christiano II). But man needs an example not alone of how to live well but also of how to repent of his sins. Therefore it would seem that there should have been sin in Christ so that, by repenting of his sins, he could give us an example of repentance.[9]

Aquinas's statement of this claim is curious, to the point where one might reasonably accuse him of setting up a "straw person". The quotation from Augustine seems noncommittal concerning just how it is that Christ is to be an example to us, although we might reasonably assume him to mean that Christ should serve as a sort of moral exemplar to us. Of course someone who is without sin will not be a good example for those of us who need to repent our sin. But

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9. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,1, p. 191.

Aquinas puts his "opponent" in the position of arguing for the importance - perhaps even the primary importance - of an example of "how to repent of (our) sins". And it seems plausible to claim that someone who is a good example of how to repent of our sins must have sins of his or her own to repent. Aquinas's response to this argument is this:

> A penitent can give praiseworthy example, not because he sinned but because he willingly bears punishment for sin. Hence Christ gave the supreme example of penitents by willingly undertaking punishment, not for his own sins but for the sins of others.[10]

One potential problem with this counter-argument is that it does not seem accurate to call Christ a penitent. It seems that a penitent is one who is doing penance. Normally one does penance for one's own sins. Aquinas stretches this to include penance done on behalf of someone else, so it does seem that Christ can set an example for penitents. But this does not really provide an adequate account of what it means to repent of one's sin or sins. The Hebrew root of the Old Testament term for repentance, *shuv*, is probably best translated as "to turn away from" with an underlying connotation of "turning away from one thing toward another". To repent of one's sins, then, is best understood as to turn away from them toward goodness and righteousness. Certainly to do that one must have sinned to begin with, and real repentance will involve rejecting one's own sin as well as accepting punishment for the sin. In fact, it is certainly possible to "willingly undertake punishment" for sin without

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10. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,1, pp. 193-4.

turning from the sin at all. One might commit the sin of theft, for example, get caught, and willingly serve the prison term (and whatever religious sanction is imposed) while simply waiting out the sentence to enjoy the fruits of the crime (or plan to do it again, only better). Thus although Christ could serve as an example of willingly undertaking punishment, he could not exemplify full repentance in the sense I have just described, since he did not have any sin to turn away from.

Although this section of the Summa does not seem entirely satisfactory as proof that Christ did not sin (or have sin in him, I do not believe that anything I have said here proves that he did. I do believe, however, that two serious questions for Aquinas's claims here have been raised. The first is the problem of Jesus' similarity to Adam with regard to his "fertilizing principle" and the effect that has on his ability to sin (and thus to be tempted to sin). The second is the problem, just discussed, of Jesus' completeness as a model of repentance, given his sinlessness. I will combine these points with some others, below, to make a case against the full humanity of Aquinas's Christ. The question of Christ as an example of how to overcome temptation will be addressed below. The next problem Aquinas takes up is whether, given that there is no sin in Christ, there is the "spark of sin" in Christ.

"Spark of sin" as it is used by Aquinas, seems to imply some readiness, tendency, or capacity for inordinate desire

or uncontrolled passions. Aquinas argues that there is no spark of sin in Christ. He suggests that there is a "tendency towards sin which is implied in the phrase 'spark of sin'".[11] He takes up the following as a first argument for the existence of this "spark" in Christ:

> It seems there was some spark of sin in Christ. The spark of sin comes from the same source as does the vulnerability of the body, or mortality; it comes from the removal of original justice by which, at once, the lower powers of the soul had been kept subject to reason and the body to the soul. But Christ was vulnerable and mortal. Therefore he also had the spark of sin.[12]

Roughly, the argument here seems to be that if Christ has the "vulnerability of the body", then he has the spark of sin that comes from that vulnerability (this is because of the removal of original justice, which affects the power of reason over the soul, which in turn controls the body). Since he has that vulnerability, then he must have the spark of sin. But of course one way out of this problem is built into Aquinas's presentation of the "source" of mortality: the removal of original justice. That is what happened by Adam's action, and we have already seen Aquinas's claim that Christ is free of Adam's "stain". But Aquinas's answer is a bit surprising:

> The lower powers belonging to the sense appetite are, by nature, meant to obey reason. But this is not true of the physical powers, either of the body's metabolism or of the vegetative soul, as is clear from I Ethics (13.1102b28). And therefore perfect virtue, which follows right reason, does not exclude vulnerability from the body; but it does exclude the spark of sin,

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11. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,2, p. 195.
12. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,2, p. 195.

> the very idea of which involves resistance by the sense appetite to reason.[13]

This response points out an interesting feature of Aquinas's view of the incarnate Christ. He is willing to grant that Christ is vulnerable and mortal (anyone who believes in the atonement must, of course). But Christ is not without original justice; in fact, Christ is in the same condition with respect to original justice that Adam was before the fall. The rest of us seem to have the spark of sin because we are descended from Adam in a way that Christ is not (see above). But Aquinas's point here is that virtue, even "perfect" virtue, does not control the body to the point of excluding its vulnerability to decay and mortality. Such virtue - especially perfect virtue - does create the possibility of controlling the spark of sin, where the body, so to speak, resists the rule of reason.

But there is some confusion here between the spark of sin as the absence of original justice and the spark of sin as concupiscence itself. This shows up a bit more clearly in the next argument:

> Again, Damascene says, "By the loving-kindness of God the body of Christ was allowed to do and to suffer whatever the flesh is heir to." (De Fide Orth., III, 19) But the flesh naturally lusts after the things that give it pleasure. Since, however, the spark of sin is really concupiscence, according to [Lombard's] Gloss (VI, 16 (Romans 7:8)), it would seem that Christ had the spark of sin.[14]

One of the primary qualities of the body is concupiscence (lust after pleasure). Since Christ has all the qualities of

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13. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,2, p. 197.
14. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,2, p. 195.

the body, then Christ was subject to concupiscence. Since concupiscence is really the spark of sin, then Christ had the spark of sin. Aquinas's response is as follows:

> The flesh naturally lusts after what gives it pleasure, through desire residing in the sense appetite. But the flesh of man, who is a rational animal, desires these things according to the manner and measure of reason. And in this way the flesh of Christ, through the longing of the sense appetite, naturally desired food and drink and sleep and other such things as may reasonably be desired- a point made by Damascene (De Fide Orth. III, 14). But it does not follow from this that Christ had the spark of sin; for that implies a longing for what gives pleasure without any reference to reason.[15]

But this response seems to be based on an equivocation on "longing".[16] He claims, at first, that the flesh of Christ "naturally lusts" or desires (or longs for) what gives it pleasure, within the confines of reason. That is concupiscence; the emotion or passion of desiring what is simply good. The flesh of an animal with a rational soul is naturally concupiscent. Before the fall, the human situation of original justice kept the reason in charge of the balance or control of the passions (including concupiscence). Thus the passions were not absent; they were simply under appropriate control. But Aquinas then denies that Christ had any such longing: to claim that Christ had the spark of sin would be to say that he had "a longing for what gives pleasure without any reference to reason".

But that is precisely the longing that any being with a sense appetite has. And this includes the incarnate Christ.

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15. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,2, p. 197.
16. I am indebted to Gary Matthews for suggesting this.

The equivocation results from claiming that Christ had "the longing of the sense appetite" but did not have a "longing for what gives pleasure without reference to reason". The longing of the sense appetite is a longing without reference to reason, as well. It is simply the case in rational animals that reason exercises some control over those longings. Suppose that I am dreadfully thirsty and I see a pool of water. Next to the pool is a sign that says "Do Not Drink: Poison". I am capable of refraining from drinking the water because of the capacity of reason that I have in virtue of being a rational animal. An animal without reason lacks any such capacity. Neither reason itself nor the original justice, were I to have it, would prevent my sense appetite from desiring water. It is unclear, I think, whether my reason could prevent my sense appetite from desiring the water in the pool, knowing that it is poison. Certainly my reason may prevent me from acting on my desire for water (or even for that water). It also seems clear, however, that it is incorrect to hold that Christ, in his human existence, lacked the longings of sense appetite.

It seems to make more sense for Aquinas to refute the argument above by denying that the spark of sin is concupiscence. Aquinas seems to use the "spark" metaphor in its traditional sense of "capacity or ability for 'irrational emotions'" or in the case of concupiscence, inordinate desires.[17] Concupiscence itself is not properly

17. See Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 1a2ae. 74,4 (v. 25,

thought of as the spark of sin, on this view, but rather as the kindling in which the spark can catch fire. The spark seems to be located in the will (which is where sin takes place); it is, perhaps, the failure of reason to control the desires of the sense appetite.

Following this line of reasoning, we can claim that Christ had the normal human sensual desires that "the flesh is heir to". But Christ has not lost original justice, as all the descendants of Adam have, so there is in him no spark of sin; that is, there is no apparent capacity for inordinate desires.

But it is wrong to imagine here that the issue is settled. For it is also the case that while Adam did not lack original justice, he was nonetheless capable of sinning. The third argument about whether the spark of sin was in Christ suggests that Adam lacked some strength of spirit that Christ had. Here is the argument in favor:

> Moreover, because of the spark of sin "the flesh lusts again in the spirit," as we read in Galatians (5:17). But the spirit proves itself stronger and more worthy of its crown the more it conquers its enemy, the lusts of the flesh. This is the sense of "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules", in II Timothy (2:5). But Christ had the strong and all-conquering spirit, the one most worthy of a crown, according to Revelation, "and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer" (6:2). It would seem, then, that Christ, above anybody else, ought to have had the spark of sin.[18]

We can formulate an argument from this passage along the lines of the following:

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p.103).
18. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,2, p. 195.

(1) Christ had the strongest spirit: the one "worthy of a crown".
(2) If (1), then Christ battled and conquered the enemy.
(3) If Christ battled and conquered the enemy, then Christ had the spark of sin.
(4) Therefore Christ had the spark of sin.

Aquinas answers this by granting (1) but claiming something quite different for the "strongest" spirit:

> The strength of the spirit is shown to some extent when it fights against the lusts of the flesh that opposes it. But it is shown to a far greater extent if, by its power, the flesh is entirely overcome, so that it can no longer lust against the spirit. And this was the case with Christ, whose spirit reached the highest degree of strength. Furthermore, although he did not have to cope with the attacks from within due to the spark of sin, he did undergo attack from outside, both from the world and the devil. In conquering these he merited the crown victory.[19]

Aquinas seems to intend that the following sentence rejects premise (2) of the argument above:

> But it (the strength of the spirit) is shown to a far greater extent if, by its power, the flesh is entirely overcome, so that it can no longer lust against the spirit.[20]

This seems to suggest that it is false to claim that "the spirit proves itself stronger and more worthy of the crown the more it conquers its enemy, the lusts of the flesh", which is the basis for premise (2). Rather, according to Aquinas, there is a greater power of spirit that is so strong that it prevents lust against the spirit from even occurring.

It seems, however, that there are two possible readings of the sentence just quoted above. Neither of them achieves

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19. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,2, p. 197.
20. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.15,2, p. 197.

the result Aquinas desires. The first reading is something like this: the strongest spirit is so powerful that the flesh cannot - is not able to - lust against it. Thus the battle, so to speak, is never joined, because the outcome is clear in advance.

But here is a problem with this reading. Either the "flesh" of some human individual can lust or it cannot. By "lust" here I think Aquinas means the simple desire of the sense appetites for pleasures (not sinful lust). So either the flesh can long for food, sleep, etc., or it cannot. If it can, then it is incorrect to claim that even the strongest spirit can somehow prevent this ability. But in any case where the spirit is so strong that the flesh lacks the ability to lust or long for various goods, then the humanity of that individual is questionable, at best. Whatever human nature is, in earthly form it certainly includes that ability of the flesh to lust, in the sense that the sense appetite longs for goods.

The second reading of the sentence above is this: after the conflict between the lust of the flesh and the spirit, the flesh is overcome so that it can no longer lust against the spirit. But, following this reading, the flesh has, at least for a time, the ability to lust. In that case a real, inward conflict does exist, so it is incorrect to conclude that Christ did not have to "cope with attacks from within" due to the spark of sin or something else (perhaps simple concupiscence). This reading is somewhat more dubious

(according to my Latin translator, it has little basis in the text) and, in any case, it certainly does not seem to help Aquinas reach his conclusion. It may be that the same treatment of the "spark of sin" used above may help Aquinas out of this jam, but he does not make use of it here. Given that the first reading is the one Aquinas would prefer, it seems that he has not explained how a person with a full human nature, fully incarnated, can fail to have the ability to long for simple sensual goods.

The final argument of interest here concerns the fittingness of Jesus' temptation. Here we want to focus on two parts of Aquinas's text. First we shall note Aquinas's third justification for the fittingness of the temptation of Christ:

> Thirdly, [Christ was tempted] in order to give us an example: to teach us, namely, how to overcome the temptations of the devil. For this reason Augustine says that Christ "allowed himself to be tempted" by the devil, "so that, in overcoming these temptations, he might be our Mediator, not only as one who helps us, but also as one who gives us the example". (De Trinitatae IV, 13, 17)[21]

Only the third argument for the conclusion that it was not fitting that Christ be tempted is of immediate concern to us:

> Furthermore, temptation is threefold: of the flesh, the world, and the devil. But Christ was not tempted by the

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21. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 53, 3a.38-45, trans. by R.J. Hennessey, O.P., (New York and London: Blackfriars, in conjunction with McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, and Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1976); 3a.41,1, p. 73.

> flesh or the world. Therefore neither should he have been tempted by the devil.[22]

This does not seem to be a terrific argument against the possibility or the fittingness of Christ's temptation. It is really not an argument at all, but rather a kind of assertion against the claim that it was fitting for Christ to be tempted. But what is of real interest here is Aquinas's reply:

> As the Apostle says, Christ wished to be "tempted in every way, without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Now temptation which comes by way of an enemy can be without sin, because it comes about by mere outward suggestion. But temptation which comes by way of the flesh cannot be without sin, because a temptation is brought about by pleasure and concupiscence; and, as Augustine says "there is some sin whenever 'the desire of the flesh opposes the spirit'"(City of God, XIX, 4), and so Christ wished to be tempted by an enemy, but not by the flesh.[23]

There are two problems with this set of claims. The first is a textual one. Aquinas reads "he was tempted in every way as we are, without sin" to mean that Christ was tempted only in those situations (such as the devil offering him dominion over the world) where the "attack" is from without. Since Christ was without sin (or its spark) it was not possible that he suffer the temptations that are from within (and, as such, sinful). The problem here is that this is a unique way of reading this text. Most English translators render this passage as something like "Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, yet he did not sin." Certainly Aquinas's use of his translation opens him to the

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22. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.41,1, p. 71.
23. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.41,1, p. 75.

charge of using that translation most convenient to his interpretation.

The other problem has to do with two of the claims about temptation. The first is the claim that Christ's temptation as an example for us:

> [Christ was tempted] in order to give us an example: to teach us, namely, how to overcome the temptation of the devil.[24]

The second is that Christ "did not have to cope with attacks from within due to the spark of sin". If we follow Aquinas's version of the passage from Hebrews, Jesus' incarnation gives us an example for only one kind of temptation. Jesus was immune to the temptation of the flesh (see above), but we are not.

Here is the problem. It seems, on this view, that Christ is a poor example for us. While he is a good example for temptations from without, he is not an example at all for "attacks from within". And yet that is the kind of "attack" we are perhaps most subject to. It may even be that temptations from the devil or the world would have no effectiveness were it not for the inward susceptibility of our spirits. But that does not make much difference for this problem: Christ is simply not an example to us for "attacks from within". Aquinas is committed to this, however, because if Christ were to be an example to us for "attacks from within" he would fall prey to Augustine's "problem". That is the problem that "temptation which comes by way of the flesh

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24. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 3a.41,1, p. 73.

cannot be without sin". So we are left with either a poor example or else a sinful one, but in neither case a good one.

There is another, related problem. Adam was created with "original justice": roughly, the state of grace before original sin, in which one is both morally and emotionally stable, as well as being endowed with various physical gifts such as immortality.[25] We are all bereft of original justice because of the sin of Adam. The lack of original justice results in the inability of our reason properly to control our lusts, etc. This, of course, is one reason or explanation for the inevitability of our own sin, but that is another matter. Christ is born as a human baby with original justice, however, because his paternal ("fertilizing") principle is not from a human father, but from a divine Father (following this view, it is tempting to say that Aquinas thought that sin was sperm-specific). But Adam was created with original justice. He was also created, more importantly, with the capacity to lose his original justice; that is, Adam had the capacity to sin. We might say that Adam was able to will or to intend to sin. But Jesus had no such capacity. He could not will, or intend, to sin. This inability is due to his divine nature.

Aquinas has, of course, at least one line of defense against this point. He can claim that Jesus had the same

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25. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 49, translator's glossary, p. 224.

capacity to sin that Adam had. The difference is that, for Jesus, his divine nature was so strong that it simply overrode, as it were, the capacity to sin so that, in practice, it was impossible for Jesus to sin. We might understand the passage quoted above, about the strength of Jesus' spirit, to express this claim. This strength, Aquinas might argue, is so great that "the flesh is entirely overcome, so that it can no longer lust against the spirit".

But this suggests the same problem that was mentioned above. If the flesh of some person cannot long for food, sleep, etc., then the person who lacks this ability is questionably human. If the overcoming of the longing of the flesh takes place during Jesus' lifetime, then there was a time when Jesus had the "inner battle" between the flesh and the spirit that Aquinas denies. In any case, Aquinas's Jesus lacks the ability to lose his original justice while Adam clearly had the ability. At best, the inability to sin makes Jesus a poor model or example for those of us who not only can sin but will. At worst, it is precisely the ability to lose his original justice that marks Adam as truly and fully human while Jesus was not; Jesus, in Adam's place, could not have committed the sin which stained the rest of us. Since we cannot have his strength of spirit (none of us is divine), it seems that Aquinas's Jesus fails as a moral model or example.

Thus it seems, finally, that Aquinas has failed to solve the Temptation Problem. Apparently it is not the case

that Christ is tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. The view of Christ he gives us is, finally, one in which Christ, while fully divine, is not fully human.

## CHAPTER 4

## ON STURCH'S SOLUTION

Although there has been only a limited amount of discussion of what I have called the Temptation Problem among modern philosophers, what discussion there has been seems interesting. In this chapter I discuss two versions of the problem of whether it was possible for Jesus to sin, as they are considered by R.L. Sturch in an article in Religious Studies.[1] Sturch's foil, for his first argument, is C.B. Martin's assertion, in his book Religious Belief, that there is a basic contradiction in the doctrine of the Incarnation as it has been traditionally taught and understood. Martin's claim is this:

> The contradiction is that Christ can be *conceived* to have been other (that is, not good) than he was, yet as God it should be not just false but *inconceivable* that he should have been not good.[2]

There is some confusion about exactly what Martin means by this claim. Much of the confusion focuses on his use of the term "conceive". Martin seems to mean something like this. Jesus was human. He was born of a human mother, lived an apparently normal human childhood, and grew to adulthood in the same fashion as other Jewish youths of his time. When we think of this "historical Jesus", it is easy to imagine

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1. R.L. Sturch, "God, Christ, and Possibilities", Religious Studies, no. 16, (March 1980), pp. 81-84.
2. C.B. Martin, Religious Belief, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1959), p. 62.

or conceive that the individual we normally call Jesus, who was a carpenter and a carpenter's son about two thousand years ago in Galilee, could have done something morally wrong. We can conceive, for example, that he lied to his mother, or lusted in some morally incorrect way after Mary Magdalene, or some such thing. Sometimes a valuable distinction is made between Jesus, the historical figure, and Christ, the role of sinless Messiah that Jesus is reported to have filled. Martin seems to claim that, even when we think of Jesus as the person occupying the role "Christ", we can still conceive or imagine that he did something morally wrong; that is, even granting that Jesus as the Christ was sinless, we can nonetheless conceive that Jesus could have done something morally wrong. In that case we can conceive that he "could have been other than he was". But the Christ is claimed, in the traditional teachings of Christianity, to have had a divine nature; that is, he was part (one person) of the triune God of many of the earliest Christian creeds.

This God is normally claimed to have a variety of divine attributes, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect moral goodness. Traditionally this last attribute has been understood to mean that, at the least, God is necessarily morally good. A being who is necessarily morally good cannot possibly sin or perform an act that is morally wrong. According to Martin, someone who properly understands the term "God" cannot then use it to refer to any entity who

is not morally perfect. "God" is a name that refers to the being who is morally perfect, so it makes no more sense to say that it is conceivable that God could do something morally wrong than it does to say that someone is both a bachelor, properly understood, and, at the same time, married. The person who is the Christ is also God, with a fully divine nature, and therefore possessing the divine attributes mentioned above (as well as a number of others, of course). Thus Martin concludes that it is inconceivable that Christ, since he was God, could have been other than morally perfect. Martin's case here seems to boil down to the claim that the following two sentences are contradictory:

> (1) One can conceive the idea that Christ was able to do wrong (for example, to commit adultery with Martha).
>
> (2) One cannot conceive the idea that Christ was able to do wrong.

It is important to keep in mind the notion that "Christ" refers to the person, also named Jesus of Nazareth, who has both a human and a divine nature. Critics of Martin's work claim that there is no contradiction at all between the claim that Christ can be conceived to have done something morally wrong and the claim that Christ (properly understood as a being for whom it is impossible to do something morally wrong) cannot be conceived to have done something morally wrong. We may call this the Conceivability Objection. It seems to center on the notion that someone may be able to conceive certain states of affairs that are not

logically possible. It may be, for example, that time travel is not logically possible. Let's suppose that it is the case that time travel is logically impossible. But certainly it seems that many of us can conceive of time travel. It seems, then, that it need not be contradictory to claim that "time travel is logically impossible" and "time travel is conceivable". This seems like a reasonable objection, but it is possible for us to understand Sturch's complaint against Martin without developing it further here. I will come back to this point below.

R.L. Sturch rejects Martin's position. In his article "God, Christ, and Possibilities"[3], Sturch attempts to refute Martin's claim by distinguishing between two types of "possibility-statement". The first, which he calls "strict logical possibility", is used to refer to those states of affairs that are not logically impossible. The second type is what Sturch calls "statements of relative possibility", which he describes as statements in which

> the possibility is relative to the speaker's existing knowledge, or at least to that part of his knowledge on which he is drawing at the time of speaking.[4]

Examples of such statements are "I may possibly be going away next weekend" and "It is possible that we left the stove on". It is logically impossible, for example, that I be in both Boston and Los Angeles at ten o'clock in the morning, Eastern Standard Time, next Friday. So I might

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3. Sturch, "God, Christ, and Possibilities", pp. 81-84.
4. Sturch, "God, Christ, and Possibilities", p. 81.

claim truly, using the first type of possibility statement, that "It is not possible that I be in both Boston and Los Angeles at ten in the morning, Eastern Standard Time, next Friday." An example of the second sort of possibility statement would be, "It is possible that I will be in Boston next Friday at 10 in the morning, Eastern Standard Time." As far as I know now, that is, or at least as far as I am currently drawing on my knowledge, I can be in Boston next Friday at ten am EST. One interesting feature of Sturch's view is that this statement seems to be true even if, for example, I know that I am going to be in New York next Friday, but I do not at the time of speaking remember that.

Sturch's objection to Martin goes something like this. Sturch says that Martin claims that there is a contradiction between these two propositions:

(i) It was possible that Christ should not be good.

(ii) It was not possible that Christ should not be good.

Sturch, of course, replies to Martin by claiming that (i) and (ii) can be read in such a way that they are not contradictory. This is because, he suggests, we can have available to us different pieces of information or evidence at different times. This information or evidence affects the meaning of "possible" in each statement. Both statements, then, can be true at the same time. We can truly assert the first statement, "given as our evidence that Christ was human", while of course it is not true given the information

that Christ was divine. At the same time, given the information that Christ was divine, (ii) is also true. Therefore there is no contradiction.

Sturch, then, seems to think we must equivocate on the meaning of "possibility" in order to truthfully assert (i) and (ii). In particular, he suggests that we may be ambiguous in our use of the term "possible". In the first instance we use "possible" to mean something like "epistemically possible", while in the second we use "possible" to mean something like "strictly logically possible". His claim, then, amounts to saying that two apparently contradictory sentences about possibility, such as (i) and (ii) above, need not be contradictory at all, provided that one sentence can be understood in terms of logical possibility and the other in terms of epistemic possibility. It actually seems that he claims that so long as the two sentences can be understood in two different contexts of the memory or knowledge of the speaker, then they are not contradictory. Take, for another example, the following two sentences.

> (iii) It is possible that this essay was composed on a computer.
>
> (iv) It is not possible that this essay was composed on a computer.

Sturch would claim that these sentences can be understood in such a way that they are not contradictory. According to Sturch, as long as I am drawing on two different "parts" of my knowledge when I utter these

sentences, they are both true. Suppose that at one moment I recall the process of sitting at my keyboard, composing this essay, and I utter (iii). At that moment, (iii) expresses something true. A moment later, distracted in some way or simply blocking out the appropriate part of my memory, as well as any knowledge I have of computers and their use (particularly by me), I utter (iv). At that second moment, according to Sturch, (iv) is true; that is, it expresses a possibility relative to that part of the speaker's knowledge on which he is drawing at the time of speaking.

This is actually a more plausible position than it seems at first glance. We usually say that two sentences are contradictory when they are formal contradictories. But what Sturch has done here is to propose that we equivocate on the term "possibility". In sentence (iii), the possibility expressed might be strictly logical possibility. In sentence (iv), however, the possibility expressed might be epistemic possibility. It may be more accurate to describe this possibility as "current epistemic possibility"; that is, possibility relative to the knowledge one draws on at the moment. Thus someone who does not know where Los Angeles and Boston are located, might say truly that "It is possible that Tom will be in both Boston and Los Angeles at ten am EST next Friday." It is epistemically possible, to the speaker, that I may be in both those places at the same time next Friday. But of course it not strictly logically possible, especially when one considers what we mean by

"Boston" and "Los Angeles". We must beware, however, that the knowledge, or lack thereof, of the speaker of any sentence is not sufficient to change or establish the strictly logical possibility of some state of affairs described by that sentence. Someone might claim, in response, that some state of affairs obtains "for all I know" unless it is strictly logically possible that state of affairs obtains. But this does not seem to be the case. Surely there are states of affairs about which I have no knowledge that are, in fact, strictly logically impossible. But I can nonetheless truly claim about those states of affairs that, for all I know, they are possible.

Sturch's claim, then, is that (iii) and (iv) are both true, provided that we understand "possible" to mean one thing in (iii) and another thing in (iv). He makes the same claim, as well, for (i) and (ii), in response to Martin's position that (i) and (ii) are contradictory. But this seems at best confusing, and it actually may be misleading. It is misleading, it seems, to claim that (i) and (ii) are not contradictory unless he makes explicit the qualification that we must understand (i) to be a claim about "relative" (epistemic) possibility and (ii) to be a claim about strictly logical possibility. Where Sturch is misleading can be found in his explanation that "possibility is normally relative" to some "given" or other; should the "given" element change, the possibility changes. But what changes is not the actual state of affairs with respect to its

possibility. What changes, rather, is the sense of "is possible" that appears in each claim, respectively. He gives three examples:

> Now, as we have noticed, possibility is normally relative; a state of affairs cannot, except in the sense of strict logical possibility, be possible in itself, but only given some other state of affairs. And if the 'given' element changes, the possibility of that first state of affairs changes, too. Given as our background knowledge or evidence that Dickie is an animal, it is possible that he is a bird; given that he is a human being, it is quite impossible. Yet being an animal and being a human are in no way incompatible. Similarly, given as our evidence that Christ was human, the assertion 'Christ could have sinned (even if in fact he never did)' is a possible one; given that he was divine, it is not. And there is no contradiction. Indeed, very much the same situation can arise with others besides Christ. Given 'Jane is human' it is possible that Jane is a sinner; given that Jane is only two hours old, it is not. Yet being two hours old does not preclude being human.[5]

On a generous reading, Sturch's claim here actually seems to amount to this: two apparently contradictory sentences about Christ (or about Dickie or Jane) are not contradictory, provided that we read them in such a way that they do not contradict each other. But it is not entirely clear that this generous reading is justified. At the beginning of this passage, Sturch proposes this view:

> Now, as we have noticed, possibility is normally relative; a state of affairs cannot, except in the sense of strict logical possibility, be possible in itself, but only given some other state of affairs. And if the 'given' element changes, the possibility of that first state of affairs changes, too.

The last sentence is key. On the generous reading, what Sturch is saying here is something like, "...if the 'given'

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5. Sturch, "God, Christ, and Possibilities", p. 82.

element changes, the epistemic possibility of that first state of affairs changes." But it seems more or less equally plausible to read this phrase as a claim about the changing nature of the strictly logical possibility that is a property of some state of affairs. In the case of a necessary property or state of affairs, such a claim is, at best, quite unclear. If some property X is a necessary property of some property-holder A, that means that it is not possible for A to obtain while X does not. The possibility of X is relative to A's existence, but not to anyone's knowledge of A's existence. The reason that (i) and (ii) are properly claimed to be contradictory is they are formal contradictories. At the least, it seems, Sturch is sloppy enough about his own use of "relative" possibility to mislead us into thinking that he is making a more serious claim; he almost echoes Boso (see Chapter 2) in sounding as though he is claiming that it is both possible and not possible for Christ to commit a sin. And, of course, he is claiming that, but only in the limited way of saying that two different kinds of possibility are at work in those claims.

One further clarification of Sturch's move may help: Sturch has really turned the apparently contradictory claims about Jesus into conditional sentences. For example:

> (1) If all we know about Dickie is that he is an animal, then it is possible that he is a bird.
>
> (2) If all we know about Dickie is that he is a human being, then it is not possible that he is a bird.

These sentences are not contradictory, of course. Sturch seems to maintain that this use of conditional sentences is really the way to express the claims about Christ:

> (3) If all that we know about Christ is that he was human, then it is possible that he sinned.
>
> (4) If all we know about Christ is that he was divine, then it is not possible that he sinned.

These two sentences are not contradictory, either. They do not, however, correctly express the claims made about the possibility of Christ sinning. The claim that Christ was tempted in every way as we are is a stronger claim than the claim that if Christ was human, then it was possible that he should do wrong. The first claim, that Christ was tempted in every way that we are, means more or less that Christ was enticed or allured to do something that was unwise or immoral with the anticipation or promise of gain, reward, or pleasure. This implies that it was possible for him to be so enticed (it entails that he was so enticed). The second claim, that if Christ was human then it was possible for him to sin, is simply a conditional claim that is limited in a hidden way even beyond its conditionality. Suppose it is true that Christ was human (he had a full human nature). Sturch's reading of the sentence, "It is possible that Christ should do something wrong," is actually, "It is possible, for all we know, that Christ should do something wrong." Above, however, I have suggested that there are states of affairs that are logically impossible but about

which we (or at least I) have little or no knowledge. My lack of knowledge would never make it the case that those states of affairs are, then logically possible. Again, this is where Sturch's reading seems misleading.

We may want to propose a way out of this difficulty by pointing out that Martin might have been a bit clearer. Let us suppose that some state of affairs is "logically possible" when there is some possible world where that state of affairs obtains. That state of affairs (or any state of affairs) is logically impossible when there is no possible world where that state of affairs obtains. Thus a state of affairs that is logically impossible cannot be logically possible, and vice versa. Martin might have made his case stronger (or at least clearer) if he had said that the following two sentences are contradictory:

> (i*) It was logically possible that Christ should not be good.
>
> (ii*) It was logically impossible that Christ should not be good.

Of course it is still true that someone could believe that (i*) is true when, in fact, it is false. Such a person might not know that (ii*) is true. But this way of stating the problem seems to eliminate the problem of equivocating on "possibility". If (i*) is true, then (ii*) is clearly false, and vice versa. This better states what Martin meant, I believe, and Sturch's distinction will not support the claim that these two sentences are not contradictory.

Sturch takes up a second problem, one that he attributes to Peter Geach, in which the problem of the impossibility of God's actually having certain qualities that Jesus possessed is raised.[6] Sturch's discussion in this case starts with the logic of reduplicative propositions, in particular ones such as "Christ, as God could not be tired " or "Christ, as human could possibly sin", etc. Reduplicative propositions, loosely speaking, are propositions in which some quality or part of the subject is restated, highlighted, or repeated, usually in the form, "X, as Y, etc." Geach considers something like the following two propositions:

(1) Christ, as God, could not possibly sin.

(2) Christ, as human, could possibly sin.

The problem, as Sturch frames it, is this: unlike the possibility of Jesus committing a sin, Jesus "actually <u>was</u> embodied, tired, and the rest, and how can this be squared with his being divine?"[7] Sturch draws attention to two forms that reduplicative propositions can take in order to explain how Jesus could be both divine and tired. Unfortunately, as we shall see, this explanation falls back on the epistemic distinction he makes in connection with his objection to Martin, and he repeats the earlier mistake of equivocating between epistemic possibility and strict logical possibility. The two forms he uses are these:

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6. Peter Geach, <u>Providence and Evil</u>, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 24-28.
7. Sturch, "God, Christ, and Possibilities", p. 83.

(3) X, as P, is Q.

(4) X is, as P, Q.

Sturch suggests that these two differ in at least the following way: in the first form, when we know that X is P then we know that X is (or has) Q. This is apparently not true for the second form. Sturch suggests, then, that these forms can be interpreted as follows:

(5) X is Q because it is P.

(6) X is Q in its capacity as P.

Sturch claims that *both* these interpretative forms can be used properly to understand reduplicative propositions. Geach has proposed two sentences:

(7) Jones as Mayor can attend this committee meeting.

(8) Jones can as Mayor attend this committee meeting.

These sentences, Geach claims, are different, because in the case where Jones is not yet the mayor but has the opportunity of becoming Mayor the second sentence is true while the first is not (this can be seen most clearly if we read "has the opportunity of attending" for "can"). Geach uses this sentence as an example of the Aristotelian point that the second way is, in fact, the correct way of analyzing reduplicative propositions; that is, the "as" phrase must be understood as complicating the predicate, rather than the subject term.

Sturch proposes that either way of analyzing the sentences may be correct. He defends this claim by proposing two more sentences:

(9) Jones as Mayor is debarred from voting at Council Meetings except in the case of a tie.

(10) Jones is, as Mayor, debarred from voting at Council meetings except in the case of a tie.

Sturch claims that his example can be accurately stated only in the first of these two sentences. He offers this as a way of showing that Geach is wrong that only the second way of analyzing these reduplicative propositions is correct. But here Sturch seems to be mistaken. He claims that, since anyone who holds the office of mayor is debarred from voting (except in case of a tie), then it is of no use for Jones to vote any other way (for example, as Director of the Gnome Works). This is because, Sturch argues, "The impossibility of voting applies to anyone who holds the office of Mayor."[8] Here is the problem with Sturch's example. He is assuming that Jones is always Mayor. But of course he is not. Take the case where Jones is a Council member, but he is not Mayor. Then (9) is false (because Jones is not the Mayor) but (10) is true. Or take the case where Jones is not only not the Mayor but he is also not a Council member. Then (9) is false but (10) is not. Even Sturch's example, where Jones is the mayor, is not better conveyed by (9) than (10). We can see this clearly if we apply the forms from (5) and (6). Sturch wants to focus on the case where Jones is mayor. There, he claims, (9) is the correct reading. This is parallel to (5). But Jones-as-Mayor is not debarred from voting. Jones, in his <u>capacity</u> as

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8. Sturch, "God, Christ, and Possibilities", p. 83.

Mayor, is so debarred. This is parallel to (6). The "as" phrase complicates the predicate, not the subject.

Sturch claims his analysis of the Jones case is similar to the situation with Christ:

> Similarly, if Christ is, as God, debarred from feeling tired, then surely he is also debarred from being tired simpliciter, even though he is not debarred from it as, say, a carpenter.[9]

What Sturch has done here is assume the truth of Christ's being God. Suppose, for a moment, that it is not true that Christ is God. Then the sentence "Christ is, as God, debarred from feeling tired' is still true. But the sentence "Christ as God is debarred from feeling tired" is not (for the same reason that "Jones as Mayor can attend this committee meeting" is not true when Jones is not Mayor).

But even if it is true that Christ is God (or at least has a divine nature), it is not obviously true that if Christ is, as God, debarred from feeling tired then he is also debarred from feeling tired simpliciter, as Sturch claims. Geach points out that the correct Aristotelian analysis of "A is, as P, Q" is 'A', subject, 'is, as P, Q', predicate. This predicate ('is, as P, Q') is a complex predicate term that

> entails the simple conjunctive predicate 'is both P and Q' but not conversely.[10]

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9. Sturch, "God, Christ, and Possibilities", p. 83.
10. Geach, Providence and Evil, pp. 26-27.

So the predicate "as God, is debarred from feeling tired" entails "is both God and debarred from feeling tired". But Sturch is not going to abandon his "epistemic possibility" position easily.

> The questions is, for the theologian, to which form assertions like 'God cannot be a body' or 'God cannot be tired' should be assigned. (I am assuming that these are to be understood as compressed forms either of 'God cannot be tired-as-God' or 'God, as God, cannot ever be tired'.) Knowledge again is our clue: we do perhaps know enough about divinity to know that it excludes tiredness from its own sphere, that no-one who is God can be tired in the work proper to him as God. But this does not automatically entail (though it might of course be true, and indeed an Arian, say might try to show that it was) that we know enough about divinity to be sure that it excludes tiredness from anyone who shares in it, that no one who is God can ever be tired in any capacity. Assertions like 'God cannot be tired' do therefore require analysis (failing more complete information) into the [second] form.[11]

Perhaps it is worth commenting here on the central issue of using reduplicative propositions to explain the Incarnation. It is helpful, of course, to suggest why God, as human, can be tired, sad, or whatever. God, even with a divine nature that has certain necessary characteristics or qualities, can voluntarily take on properties that are contingent (God can take on the property of being tired, or of suffering bodily pain, etc.). Thus it can be perfectly true to say that "God is, as incarnated, tired, sad, able to feel pain, or whatever". That is because God's divine nature does not debar God from taking on properties that are normally thought, in themselves, to be contingent. It could be, for example, that God has the property of being

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11. Sturch, "God, Christ, and Possibilities", p. 84.

incarnated, in a certain fashion, necessarily. While incarnated, necessarily, God feels tired, which seems like a contingent property. I do not think that much turns on this, except the point that there is nothing untoward about God, when incarnated, feeling tired. In fact, this is Geach's point. But, if God can, as human, be tired, why is it not true that God, as human, can possibly sin?

Sturch tries to solve this, above, by using reduplicative propositions in the way I have outlined. But the problem of Christ is that he has two natures, one human and one divine. It seems to be a standard understanding of "nature" to say that some being that has a certain nature has the properties of that nature necessarily. Thus the properties that one has in virtue of one's nature will not be contingent properties. "Having a vote in Council decisions", and "being the mayor" are both contingent properties. But the sinlessness of Christ will not be contingent. This is because sinlessness is a property that Christ has, necessarily in virtue of having a divine nature. That is, necessarily, if some being has a divine nature then it is sinless. Traditionally, the sinlessness of God is claimed to be necessary, since a being who is necessarily sinless is greater, it is thought, than one who is sinless contingently. So the claim is actually that necessarily, a being who is God is necessarily sinless (morally good). Christ, assuming that he has a divine nature, is then necessarily sinless.

So to try to explain the problem of the apparently contradictory nature of Christ's natures using reduplicative propositions presents a problem. The problem is that Sturch's examples [(7)-(10), above], are all reduplicative propositions that state claims about properties that Jones or the mayor have contingently. But the sentences below are about properties that Christ has in virtue of his nature (better, actually, to say in virtue of his natures). But properties that one has in virtue of one's nature are necessary, at least in the sense of "necessarily, if one has such-and-such a nature, then one has thus-and-so property". It is not at all clear that Sturch's analogy from reduplicative propositions that state claims about contingent properties, such as the ability to vote, holds for reduplicative propositions that state claims about properties that one has in virtue of one's nature. The following sentences are reduplicative propositions of the second type:

(11) Christ, as God, could not possibly commit a sin.

(12) Christ, as human, could possibly commit a sin.

(13) Christ could not, as God, possibly commit a sin.

(14) Christ could, as human, possibly commit a sin.

It is worth noting here the similarity between (13) and (10) above. Sturch's claim about (10) was that it was false because it was pointless for Jones to try to cast a vote in any other way: his being mayor prevented him from voting. But this was an inadequate view, because the proper

(Geachian) predicate was "could-not-vote-as-mayor". It was something about being mayor that prevented him from voting, but it was not (at all) a necessary fact that Jones was mayor. He might not, of course, have been mayor, in which case he might or might not have been able to vote at that Council meeting (obviously he would have to be a Council member to vote, for example). Nor is it necessary that the mayor is prohibited from voting: that is simply a contingent property that the mayor of Gnomeville happens to have. It might easily be the case that the mayor could vote. It is difficult to apply this reasoning to the case of the properties that Christ has in virtue of his natures, because of course they are a matter of necessity. Whatever it means for Christ to have a human nature, he has those qualities essentially. The same is true of his divine nature. So, although the sentence "Christ could not, as God, commit a sin" looks very much like the sentence "Jones, could not, as mayor, vote in Council meetings except in case of a tie", the two are different in the following sense. The "God-ness" of Christ is essential to him, while the "mayor-ness" of Jones is not essential to him. And the properties of God's nature are essential, while properties such as the mayor's lack of ability to vote in council meetings are not. Sturch's mistake here lies in equating the inability of the mayor of Gnomeville to vote in council meetings (except in case of a tie) with the inability of God to commit a sin. There is nothing necessary or essential about the inability

of the person who is mayor of Gnomeville to vote at those meetings; it is easy to imagine a different case. But the inability of God to sin is traditionally thought to be an essential property of divine nature: any being with divine nature therefore has that property.

Of course the sentence "God could, as an incarnate human, be tired)" looks like (14) above. And it is about God, so it is tempting to imagine that it deals with contradictory properties, or that it is based on the assumption of contingent properties for God. But there is nothing in orthodox Christianity which requires that the Incarnation was a contingent property of God or of divine nature. It seems plausible to claim that God has the property of being incarnated, at a certain time and place, necessarily. It also seems plausible to claim, that, necessarily, if God is fully incarnated in Christ, Christ would have many of the properties normally associated with humanity without contradicting his divine nature. The free ability to perform sin, however, especially for one whose innocence is required for his ability to atone for the rest of us, would not be one of those properties.

Sturch's final attempt to explain this problem away falls back on his earlier distinction between propositions or states of affairs that are possible relative to the speaker's knowledge, and propositions or states of affairs that are strictly logically possible:

> But what, then, of 'God cannot do evil', with which we began? We had earlier, in effect, been treating this as an instance of the [first] form: Christ, being God, could not do evil, although the information that he was human left it possible that he could.[12]

The appropriate reading of this form looks like this: "Christ, because he is God, could not do evil, although the information that he was human left it possible that he could." But this claim about possibility is the one rejected in the first half of this chapter. The information that Christ was human left it possible that Christ could sin only if the speaker (or hearer) did not also know that Christ was God. Thus a limited, epistemic possibility that Christ could sin exists, essentially when the speaker does not know any better. The claim that for I all know, Christ could sin, is then relevantly like the claim that for all I know, the planet Pluto has seven moons. But it is incorrect to infer that this epistemic possibility establishes the logical possibility that Christ could sin. It is true that the claim that the planet Pluto has seven moons is logically possible. But it is not logically possible <u>because</u> it is epistemically possible. The claim that for all I know, Christ could possibly sin is more like the claim that for all I know, a heptagon has six sides. The information that Christ was human leaves it <u>epistemically</u> possible that he could sin, but that does not imply that it is logically possible that Christ could sin. Sturch is less clear here about the need to read the parts of this claim with differing senses of

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12. Sturch, "God, Christ, and Possibilities", p. 84.

possible. Thus we are misled, at best, into thinking that he may be suggesting that the epistemic possibility of Christ's sinning entails the logical possibility that Christ could sin. For the believer, who looks to Jesus as a moral exemplar and a role model in the face of temptation, the epistemic possibility that Christ could sin is not much help. This is because someone who was tempted to sin, but for whom it was impossible that he commit any sin, does not really seem to be tempted in the same way as someone who is tempted to sin and who can sin. And of course the problem remains that Christian doctrine does not claim that "for all we know" it is possible that Jesus committed a sin. The claim seems to be that it was logically possible for Jesus to commit a sin: "He was tempted in every way as we are." According to our amended version of Martin, the doctrine of the Incarnation seems to contain a contradiction. Sturch's efforts to explain this contradiction away, although helpful in clarifying Martin, do not seem finally to succeed. In Chapter 5 I will discuss an interesting defense of the claim that it was possible for Jesus to be tempted, based on his own knowledge.

There is one other interesting line of argument, apparently open to Sturch, which seems to make the point he wants to make in a stronger fashion.[13] The argument for this goes something like this. It is necessary that whoever is

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13. I am indebted to Gary Matthews for suggesting this point.

Christ is sinless; that is, necessarily, if some person S is Christ, then that person is sinless. Suppose, then, that Jesus is Christ. We can even suppose, for the sake of argument, that Jesus is necessarily Christ. But it does not follow from either supposition, in conjunction with the assertion above, that Jesus is necessarily sinless. Therefore it is not necessary that Jesus is sinless. Jesus, then, could possibly commit a sin. In that case, he could be tempted to commit a sin in the same way that we are. Therefore he could be tempted in every way that we are.

This is a challenging move, and it is intriguing. It seems, based on this argument, that Jesus could be tempted not to be God (or Christ). In that case, he could be enticed or allured not to be Christ. That sounds like a real temptation, in the same way that you or I can be tempted. But careful examination reveals that this conclusion is based on a controversial - and arguably incorrect - version of the claim about the sinlessness of Christ.

It is true that it is necessary that Christ is sinless, while it need not be true that it is necessary that Jesus is the Christ. But the central claim of Christianity's doctrine of the Incarnation is not that Jesus is necessarily sinless, but that Christ is necessarily sinless. It may be true that it is not necessary that Jesus is sinless, but that is because Jesus might not be the Christ (Jesus seems to have that property contingently). But what is necessary is the sinlessness of Christ; that is, whoever is the Christ is

necessarily sinless. Thus the proper version of the claim above is that necessarily, if some person S is Christ then that person is necessarily sinless. The same result is obtained if we simply claim that if some person, S, is Christ, then that person is necessarily sinless. The defense of this version goes something like this: whoever is Christ has, besides a full and complete human nature, a likewise full divine nature. One central aspect of divine nature is moral perfection. For "moral perfection" to be an attribute of some being's nature, it must be essential or necessary (it could not be otherwise, or it is impossible for that being to be that being without that attribute). Thus whoever is Christ will be essentially, or necessarily, sinless. If Jesus is not the Christ, then he is not necessarily sinless, but then he is not Christ either, so he need not be sinless. If he is not the Christ, then he is not the role model or exemplar with respect to temptation that Christianity holds in such esteem. But if he is the Christ, then he is necessarily sinless, following this version of the tradition about Christ's nature. Thus this last argument is, at best, controversial.

# CHAPTER 5

## ON MORRIS'S SOLUTION

As we have seen in the previous four chapters, the apparently simple claim that Jesus was tempted "in every way as we are, yet without sin,"[1] gives rise to a complicated problem. The Temptation Problem does not admit of a simple solution. Thomas V. Morris, a modern philosopher writing several decades after Sturch, has proposed an intriguing solution to it. This chapter analyzes Morris's proposal.

In his book, The Logic of God Incarnate, Morris argues that the solution to the Temptation Problem lies in a relatively simple philosophical distinction.[2] He claims that, while it was metaphysically impossible for Jesus to sin, it was nonetheless epistemically possible for Jesus, while he exemplified his human nature, to sin. This epistemic possibility of sinning, Morris claims, is sufficient for the possibility of Jesus' temptation. Morris' position on the Temptation Problem, then, is that it is not a contradiction or even a problem to claim that it was impossible for Jesus to sin and also possible for him to sin as long as we understand that it was possible epistemically for Jesus to sin.

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1 . Hebrews 4:15. All Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

2. Thomas V. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 146-153.

Of course Morris has some work to do in order to establish that the possibility of Jesus performing a sinful action need not be a metaphysical possibility in order to maintain that Jesus could, in fact, be tempted. This seems particularly important in order to preserve the traditional two-natures-in-one-person view of the Incarnation. Morris makes the following description of his claim:

> Jesus could be tempted to sin just in case it was epistemically possible for him that he sin. If at all the times of his reported temptations, the full accessible belief-set of his earthly mind did not rule out the possibility of his sinning, he could be genuinely tempted, in that range of consciousness, to sin. But this could be so only if that belief-set did not contain the information that he is necessarily good. In order that he suffer real temptation, then, it is not necessary that sinning be a broadly logical or metaphysical possibility for Jesus; it is only necessary that it be an epistemic possibility for him.[3]

Morris's argument may be formalized as follows:

> (1) If it was epistemically possible for Jesus to sin, then Jesus could suffer real temptation.
> (2) It was epistemically possible for Jesus to sin.
> (3) Therefore Jesus could suffer real temptation.

Morris's defense of premise (2) is fairly straightforward. Premise (2) amounts to the claim that, *for all he knew*, Jesus could sin. This would be true if "at the times of his reported temptations, the full accessible belief-set of [Jesus'] earthly mind...did not contain the information that he is necessarily good".[4] Morris defines a full accessible belief-set as follows:

> A full accessible belief-set of a person at a time consists in all only those beliefs which are accessible

3. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, p. 148.
4. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, p. 148.

> to a range of conscious thought and deliberation of that person at that time sufficient to support the initiation of action.[5]

Assuming that Jesus had no information or belief that would "rule out the possibility of his sinning", then it seems reasonable to claim that it was epistemically possible for Jesus to sin.

Premise (1) is, perhaps, a bit less straightforward. Here Morris claims that the possession of a certain belief-set - actually, the exclusion from a "full accessible" belief-set of a particular belief - is a sufficient condition for the possibility of Jesus' temptation. The belief that must be excluded from Jesus' belief-set in order to provide the appropriate full belief-set is the belief (or knowledge) that he is necessarily good. Morris's claim is that so long as Jesus does not believe that he is unable to perform a sin, then he can be tempted to perform that sin.

Morris presents two examples in defense of this claim. One is an example of a young member of an academic department who is tempted to lie to his department head. Unbeknownst to the junior faculty member, however, the department head has just died. Thus it is epistemically possible for the young professor to lie to his department head, while it is not metaphysically possible. According to Morris, this young professor can, nonetheless, "be tempted to go and lie to his department chairman."[6] There was nothing in the full accessible belief-set of the young

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5. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, p. 148.
6. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, p. 147.

professor that would cause him to believe it was not possible for him to "go and lie to" his department head; that is, for all he knew, the young professor could tell a lie to his department head. Morris's claim about this situation is that the young professor could be tempted to lie because there was no reason for him to doubt that he could.

This is a clever and interesting story. It is important to note here that Morris's claim is not that the possession of the appropriate full accessible belief-set is sufficient for temptation. His claim is, rather, that possession of the appropriate full accessible belief-set is sufficient for the possibility of temptation. He says that the young professor could be tempted as long as he believes that he is able to tell his department head a lie. It is more accurate, actually, to say that he could be tempted to tell her the lie as long as nothing prevents him from believing that he can tell her the lie. It seems reasonable, after all, to say of the young professor that, since nothing he believes to be true would suggest to him that he could not tell the department head a lie, then it is possible that he is tempted to tell her a lie.

The problem with Morris's claim is a somewhat subtle one. His sufficient condition for the possibility of temptation sounds plausible, but only because it overlaps a more plausible one. It is not true that the young professor can be tempted to lie to his department chair only because

he does not know she is dead. In order for his temptation to be possible, he must be also capable of forming - or at least of considering, somehow - the intention to perform the (sinful) act in question. He can be tempted to lie to his department head in all the cases where he can form the intention of lying to her and, of course, where nothing prevents him from believing this to be possible. There must be a possible world in which he actually intends to perform the action that he is tempted to do in this world. There is such a possible world in the case we are considering. It is the world very much like this one where he actually forms the intention to tell his department head a lie. It is true that there is nothing that he can do to bring about a world in which he actually lies to his department head. But it is his ability to intend to lie to her (coupled with the appropriate full accessible belief-set) that is sufficient for the possibility of his temptation, not his ability actually to lie to her. Surely it is not possible to be attracted or enticed to do something if it is not possible to intend to do it. Thus his belief that nothing prevents him from lying to her is, in reality, not sufficient for the possibility of his being tempted to lie to her. He must also be able to intend or will to lie to her.

Suppose that the young professor, without knowing it, has a small mechanism implanted in his brain that prohibits him from performing any morally wrong action. Whenever he is presented with a situation in which he might do something

morally wrong, it prevents him from performing such an action. Of course, since intending to do a morally wrong thing is itself morally wrong, the mechanism prevents him from so intending. The young professor believes his department head is alive. When he is presented with a situation where he might lie to her, the little mechanism prevents him from intending to lie to her, as well as from actually lying to her. He knows what a lie is, and he knows what it would mean for him to tell a lie. But if he is attracted by the opportunity to lie to her and the promise of gain or reward for doing so, and even starts to consider forming the intention to lie to her, the mechanism goes off. To consider the reward he must imagine intending to perform the action. But the situation where he forms such an intention is not really accessible to him, because the mechanism prevents him from intending to lie. Without being able to consider the connection between the action and the reward, it seems false to claim that the professor could be tempted to lie to his department head, in the theologically interesting understanding of "temptation" as enticement or allure to do something unwise or immoral with the promise of gain or reward.

Here is the important parallel in the case of Jesus. Following Morris's view, we might say that Jesus could be tempted to lie only if there is no belief in his full accessible belief-set that rules out the possibility of his telling that lie. But that is not sufficient for the

possibility of Jesus' temptation. Just as with the young professor, there must be some possible world in which Jesus forms the intention to lie in order for establish the possibility of his being tempted to lie. But, of course, there is no such world. I am assuming here, of course, that it is sinful to form the intention to sin. Jesus' necessary goodness prevents the existence of any possible world where Jesus sins. If there is no possible world where he sins, there is no possible world where he intends to sin. There is not even a possible world where it is possible that he intends to sin. Given that state of affairs, then it is not possible that Jesus was tempted to sin.

Following Morris's view, it seems that we might say that Jesus could be tempted to lie to Mary Magdalene, because it was epistemically possible that he lie to her. For all he knew, Jesus could tell her a lie. And this is true even if, in fact, it was metaphysically impossible for Jesus to do so. Given that Jesus was necessarily morally good (and assuming that telling a lie to Mary Magdalene was a morally wrong thing to do), there was no possible world in which Jesus could perform the action of telling a lie to Mary Magdalene (or to anyone else, for that matter). But the issue is whether there was any possible world in which Jesus intended to lie to Mary Magdalene.

That is the rub. For the possibility to exist that Jesus could be tempted, he must have been able to consider or imagine a world in which he intended to commit whatever

sin would tempt him. We are using the example of a lie. He must have been able to imagine or consider a world, then, where he forms the intention to lie. But of course there was no such world. Without such a world, Jesus could not have been tempted.

Morris might argue, of course, that nothing of the above denies his claim. Jesus was morally perfect, so he never considered lying; that is, he never imagined a world in which he lied. It would still be true, in that case, that for Jesus it was epistemically possible that he tell a lie. For all he knew, he could lie. To point out that he never considered actually lying does not change the truth of that claim. Thus the epistemic possibility described above is all that is needed for the possibility of temptation.

But such a defense strays pretty far from a reasonable understanding of "temptation". It also seems to establish firmly the notion that Jesus is not really a moral model relevant to human temptations and concerns. Perhaps Jesus never faced a situation in which he imagined himself lying, or one where he said something like this to himself, "I could tell an untruth here." But this seems to be poor evidence, at best, that he could be tempted to lie. If he never considered telling a lie, or having lust in his heart, or stealing, or harboring anger against someone, then it seems empty to claim that Jesus was tempted as we are.

Of course there is one clear Biblical story of an occasion when Jesus was tempted. In Luke 4 the story is told this way:

> And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"[7]

We are not considering here the sense of temptation in which Jesus is simply presented with a potentially tempting situation, the way we might say that I am tempted when my daughter shows me a box of chocolate covered ants (that is, she is presenting me with a temptation). Her presentation of the ants is a sort of "external" temptation, but we want to discuss here what might be called "internal" temptation, when one feels attracted to or allured by the temptation presented [see Chapter 1]. So we must consider whether Jesus can be tempted in this specific way that we are. If the devil took me up to the tower and presented me with a vista of all the kingdoms on earth that I could rule if only I would bow to him once, out there in the wilderness, I certainly would consider performing such an action ( we will assume that actually to perform that action would be morally

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7. Luke 4:1-8.

wrong). I am tempted by that action because there is a possible world where I actually perform it (or at least intend to perform it) which is alluring or enticing to me, and nothing in my full accessible belief-set prevents me from believing that the whole scenario is possible. For Jesus to be tempted "in every way as we are", it seems that the same must be true of him.

But it is not, at least if Jesus is necessarily good. Although it may be true that nothing in Jesus' full accessible belief-set prevents him from believing that he could worship the devil, he cannot intend to do it. To do so there would have to be a possible world where he, in fact, forms the intention of worshipping the devil. But there is no such world. Even if there were such a world, Jesus would also have to find it enticing. Presumably one finds something enticing when the thought of it is somehow enjoyable or pleasurable. But surely to enjoy or take pleasure in a sinful thought is itself sinful, and that is precisely what Jesus' nature precludes. It is not possible for Jesus to sin, so there is no possible world where he commits a sin. Certainly forming the intention of worshipping the devil is a sin. So also, if I am right, is enjoying the thought of ruling the world because one has bowed down to the Devil (a somewhat different thought from the idea of ruling the world, period). Thus there can be no possible world where Jesus forms the intention of worshipping the Devil, nor can there be one where he enjoys

or takes pleasure in the thought of such a state of affairs. This is true, of course, even if Jesus believes, somehow, that nothing prevents him from doing this. Thus it is not possible for Jesus to be tempted, by the Devil, in this very important way that you or I can be tempted.

Someone might raise the objection that Jesus might believe that it is possible for him to intend to sin. What I have just argued is intended as an answer to that objection, by noting that such a belief would be necessary, but not sufficient, for the possibility of his temptation. There seems to be a reply open to Morris, at this point, to refute my point. He might say, for example, that Jesus was fully human, just as human, say, as Johnny Nimblefinger. Now suppose that Johnny walks into the Philosophy office one day and sees a twenty dollar bill sitting on the secretary's desk. Johnny would quickly consider whether to take it or not. He might think to himself something like, "Should I take it, or not?" He would look around, ascertain that no one was present, and then slip the bill into his pocket. Now imagine Jesus in the same situation. Of course he would see the bill and consider whether to take it. Jesus would also think something like, "Should I take it, or not?" Of course he would not take it, but as long as nothing prevents him from believing that he can take it, he could (and would) consider taking it. He would be tempted, perhaps, but not succumb. He need not form the intention to take it, but it is nonetheless possible for him to think about forming such

an intention. He would simply reject it as wrong, Morris might claim, and he would leave the bill there.

In answer to this problem, it seems that we have to take seriously just what it means for something to be metaphysically impossible. Take the example of a "clear blue frog". It seems that, following any standard view of impossibility, there is no possible world where such a creature exists (assuming that what we mean by "clear" and "blue" and "frog" will hold constant between this world and any such possible world). It does not make sense to speak of such a world because there is none. The same is true of the claim that Jesus is necessarily morally good. If we take the claim seriously, then there can be no possible world where Jesus sins or intends to sin. It does not seem that there can even be a world where Jesus is attracted to or enticed by twenty stolen dollars, because that it certainly not the state of mind of a necessarily morally good person. Such a person will not enjoy the thought of owning any stolen property. It is not possible for him to be attracted to or enticed by taking the twenty dollar bill any more than it is possible to see a "clear blue frog". Thus Jesus is not the same as Johnny Nimblefinger, at least in the sense of his ability to be attracted or enticed by morally wrong actions.

This latter account of what happened at the most famous of Jesus' temptations seems almost silly. Of course he could form the intention of worshipping the devil. One small, simple bow, out where no one could see it; certainly there

is a possible world where that happens - or at least one where Jesus forms the intention of performing that action. And certainly Jesus could imagine it. That is how he was tempted, just as you or I would be. But Jesus chooses not to accept the temptation. There is a possible world in which he succumbs to it. Jesus simply rejects that world and that course of action; he overcomes the temptation. We might even say that is the point of the story.

Of course Morris is not going to give up so easily. He presents one other interesting example of his claim that "it is the epistemic possibility of sinning rather than the broadly logical, or metaphysical, or even physical possibility of sinning that is conceptually linked to temptation".[8] He might suggest this story as a defense against my criticism of his position.

> Suppose...that a certain form of time-travel is impossible, but that Brown, a great scientist with eccentric ways who loves a practical joke, approaches Jones with an elaborate-looking apparatus about the size of a telephone booth which she tells Jones can effect that form of time travel, an invention of hers as yet unknown to the world-at-large or even to the scientific community. Jones, believing Brown, can be tempted to travel in the machine in order to commit some evil deed otherwise impossible. The reality of his temptation does not require the broadly logical, or metaphysical possibility of what he is doing. It requires only that the imagined deed not be an epistemic impossibility for him. He must think it possible, and within his power to do. It need not be actually so.[9]

This example seems more like the case of Jesus than does the young professor story. It is metaphysically impossible for

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8. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, p. 147.
9. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, p.147.

Jesus to sin even if, following Morris's view, there is no member of Jesus' full accessible belief-set that prevents him from believing that he can sin. It is metaphysically impossible that Jones travel in the way described, even though he believes it to be possible (none of his beliefs prevents him from believing it possible). But as long as he believes it to be true that he can travel in that way, then it seems reasonable to infer that he can be tempted by the impossible sin. So also with Jesus. As long as Jesus does not believe it to be impossible for him to sin, then he can be tempted.

But this is not the case. But this is not the case. Jones, in the case described here, is fully capable of doing something that Jesus cannot, and it is that ability which makes it possible for Jones to be tempted where Jesus cannot be. Jones can be attracted - lured by the arousal of hope or desire - by the sin in question. It is not possible (other than epistemically) that he actually commits the evil deed. But he is able to be tempted by it not only because there is no belief in his full accessible belief-set that prevents him from believing he can do it, but also because there is a possible world in which he enjoys or takes pleasure in the thought of doing it. That possible world is what enables Jones to be attracted to or enticed by the evil deed, thus also enabling him to be tempted. The time-travel scenario is tempting to Jones not only because he believes it is possible but also because it is, in fact, possible for Jones

to be attracted to the sin in question. Thus it is not true that simply believing that there is nothing to prevent one from committing an act is sufficient to say truly that it is possible that one can be tempted by the act. It must also be possible for one to be attracted to or enticed by the act. Then, and only then, can one be tempted to perform that action.

It is precisely this ability to be enticed to commit any sin that Jesus lacks because of his divine nature, at least as that nature is traditionally understood. If Jesus is necessarily good, then there is no possible world where Jesus sins. In that case there is no possible world where Jesus is attracted or enticed to commit any sin. Jones is tempted by the time travel because he is able to be so enticed and, thus, to form the intention to commit the sin that the impossibility of time travel prohibits him from performing. Jesus cannot be tempted to commit any sins because it is not possible for him to be attracted by or enticed to sin. There are no possible worlds where Jesus forms the intention to do a morally wrong thing, and there are no worlds where he enjoys the thought of committing a sin enough to be enticed by the sin, because to do either would be to do a morally wrong thing. That, of course, is contrary to his divine nature.

Morris's error here seems to be that he has not provided appropriate sufficient grounds for a situation of temptation to exist. He wants to preserve Jesus divinity, of

course, so his attempt to show that it was somehow possible that Jesus could sin without it actually being possible that Jesus commit a sin is understandable. But I think I have shown that he fails in that attempt, despite the intriguing approach he takes. I have suggested, briefly, that a conjunction of the appropriate full accessible belief-set, the metaphysical possibility of intending to commit a sin, and the ability to be attracted by or enticed to the commission of some sin seems sufficient for the possibility of temptation. But that suggestion is only a brief sketch, and even that sketch poses problems for the claim that Jesus is necessarily morally good. In any case, it seems that Morris fails to solve the Temptation Problem, because he cannot establish that the epistemic possibility that Jesus (or anyone else) commits some sin is a sufficient condition for the claim that it is possible that Jesus (or anyone else) can be tempted to commit that sin.

Morris has one other interesting avenue of defense that he uses to claim that it need not be true that Jesus possibly sinned. He makes a distinction between the properties required for one to be merely human and those required to be fully human. The distinction goes something like this. Something that is fully *x* has all the properties essential to its being *x*. Something that is merely *x* has all the properties essential to being *x* and no other properties that will also make it something other (or, perhaps more

accurately, something "higher") than *x* metaphysically. Morris uses this example:

> Consider a diamond. It has all the properties essential to being a physical object (mass, spatio-temporal location, etc.). So it is fully physical. Consider now an alligator. It has all the properties essential to being a physical object. It is *fully* physical. But, there is a sense in which we can say that it is not *merely* physical. It has properties of animation as well. It is an organic being. In contrast, the gem is merely physical as well as being fully physical.[10]

A similar relation is true, of course, for humans. We are fully physical but not merely physical (as is a diamond). Morris's claim for Jesus is that he was (and is) fully human but not merely human. He possessed all of the characteristics of humanity, but he also possessed the properties of divinity. In particular, Morris points out that some properties we might normally think of as essential to humanity are really just common to humans, but not essential to being fully human. He suggests, for example, the properties of "coming to be at some time, being a contingent creation, and being such as to possibly cease to exist".[11] He suggests, further, that some simple thought-experiments will lend plausibility to this notion. One enjoyable example is the notion that all humans have the same origin: two biological parents (of course Adam seems to be an obvious counterexample to this, but it is a useful example nonetheless). Morris invites us to imagine a future time when scientists in a fancy lab can create, from

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10. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, pp. 65-66.
11. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, p. 67.

scratch, the makings of what we now call a fertilized human egg. Assuming that a person could then grow from such a creation, that human would not have as its origin two biological parents. So it seems wrong to claim that originating from two biological parents is essential for humanity.[12] It is however, extremely common. But Morris's point is that commonality and essentiality are not the same.

The relevant claim for which Morris uses this distinction is this:

> It can be held that being such that one possibly sins is a property essential only to being merely human, to belonging to the kind of humanity *and* to no higher kind. On this view, Jesus need not be such that he possibly sins, since he is not, on the traditional view, merely human... [Thus] an orthodox theologian can accommodate an essentiality intuition with respect to the relation between this property and ordinary human beings without counting it as a component of the kind-essence of humanity.[13]

This, at first blush, seems a somewhat stretched view. Of course Morris has an interesting point. And he makes clear, just after the passage above, just how difficult it is to pinpoint what the property of possibly sinning actually is. Do fetuses have the property of possibly sinning? Souls in heaven? Or, as Morris would have it, is possibly sinning just a property of someone who is merely human, not necessarily someone who is fully, but not merely, human?

This is somewhat reminiscent of the solution Aquinas proposed [see Chapter 3]. He suggested that while the

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12. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, p. 69.
13. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, pp. 142-143.

descendants of Adam, of course, have the property of possibly sinning due to their fertilizing principle, Jesus does not have that property because he does not have an earthly father. But Aquinas failed to allow for the fact that Adam, who also did not result from an human fertilizing principle, nonetheless had the capacity to sin (this is established by the fact that he did sin). To claim that Jesus did not have this capacity seems to deny his full humanity: Jesus then failed to have the capacity for free choice that Adam had (and the rest of us have).

To deny Jesus' full humanity based on the lack of a certain property suggests that the possibility of sinning - properly formulated - is, in fact, an essential property of human nature. Any fully human being must then have that property. And, of course, if that is true of Jesus then it cannot also be impossible that he commit a sin.

But this leaves us back at the beginning, with an unsolved Temptation Problem. It seems that either Jesus is not really a relevant model for us or that something has to give. One possibility is that Jesus lacks the possibility of sinning that the rest of us have so richly. But such a Jesus is hardly "fully human." Another possibility is that we must somehow refine our understanding of Jesus' moral goodness and, consequently, our understanding of God's moral goodness. My intuition is that the second avenue is the more promising of the two. But that is a "long and winding road", best left for a more lengthy, later treatment.

# CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, both versions of the defense of orthodox Christian doctrine about Jesus' temptation seem to fail. Augustine simply rules out the possibility that Jesus - the Christ - could be tempted by any temptation that may have sin or sinfulness as part of the temptation itself. Such a temptation would be logically impossible, but of course it is also true, then, that Christ was not tempted in all the ways that we are. Caesarius suggests, somewhat provocatively, that something about Jesus' holy will must have kept him from succumbing to temptation (of any important sort), but Caesarius simply asserts that claim without any evidence or defense.

Anselm tries to show that it is both possible and impossible that Jesus sins, but that flounders on his poor example and argument for the possibility that Jesus sins. Aquinas tries an intriguing approach, in which it is claimed that Jesus has the original justice that the rest of us lost in Adam and Eve's Fall, so that he is able to resist all temptations. On this view, however, Christ seems to lack the ability to sin that the rest of us, again, have in full measure.

Sturch proposes an interesting solution to the Temptation Problem by pointing out that it is not

contradictory to claim that it is both possible and impossible for Jesus to sin, provided that we understand that two different definitions of "possible" are intended. The claim that it is possible for Christ to sin is a claim about epistemic possibility on Sturch's view, while the claim that it is impossible for him to sin is a claim about logical possibility. While this is attractive, Sturch makes his claim in such an unclear way that he is subject to the charge of being misleading. He also fails adequately to address the problem of the apparent contradiction in the claim that it is both logically possible and logically impossible for Christ to sin.

Morris proposes what is in many ways the most intriguing solution, based on the claim that one need only to believe that nothing prevents one from performing some sinful act in order to be tempted by it. Morris fails to account for the need to be attracted to or enticed by something sinful in order to be tempted by it, and I have claimed that Christ cannot be enticed by, or take pleasure from the thought of, something sinful.

I have shown, then, that none of these attempts to solve the Temptation Problem succeeds, despite the interesting variety of approaches. In fact, I believe that it is an insoluble problem, provided that one feels compelled to hold both that God is necessarily morally perfect and that one needs to be enticed by potential pleasure or reward from something immoral or unwise in order

to be tempted. Certainly for Christ to be tempted in every way that we are, he must be tempted in this serious way, as well as in the minor ways outlined in Chapter 1.

It is worth noting here, in conclusion, that a number of contemporary philosophers have suggested that God may not, in fact, be necessarily morally perfect.[1] Two authors, Bruce Reichenbach and Nelson Pike, have also challenged the claim that a God whose nature prevents God from committing any sin is nonetheless morally praiseworthy (worthy, that is, of moral praise or approbation).[2] Given the extreme difficulty of "solving" the Temptation Problem, this is a probable and promising route. To travel along this route, however, will of course entail abandoning almost two thousand years of Christian orthodoxy. My project has simply been to make the case stronger for the need to explore routes like this one, which are alternatives to the traditional orthodoxy. I have tried to show that the Temptation Problem is a difficult or even impossible position that nonetheless requires defending within traditional, orthodox Christian doctrine. To the extent that I have shown this I hope to encourage a reconsideration of

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1. See (for example) Wesley Morriston, "Is God Significantly Free?", Faith and Philosophy, vol. 2, no. 3 (July 1986), pp. 257-264; Robert F. Brown, "God's Ability to Will Moral Evil", Faith and Philosophy, vol. 8, no. 1 (January 1991), pp. 3-20.
2. Nelson Pike, "Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin", American Philosophical Quarterly 6 (1969), pp. 208-215; Bruce R. Reichenbach, "Why is God Good?", Journal of Religion 60 (1980), pp. 51-60.

the nature of God's moral goodness and its relationship to the moral world of Christian believers.

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